

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Jesuit Educational  
Center for Human Development

**The Ministry of Authority**



**Neurotics in Religious Settings**



**Envy Is a Longing for Wholeness**

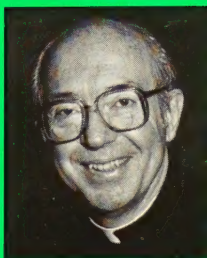


**Progression in Apostolic Change**



**Making Sense of Martyrdom**

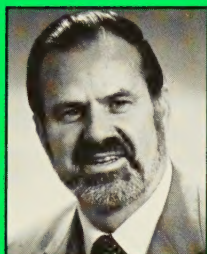




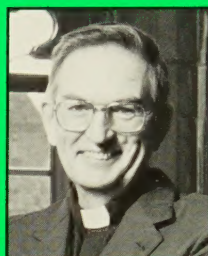
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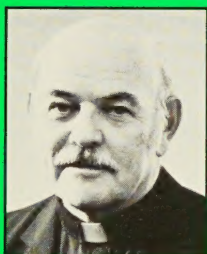
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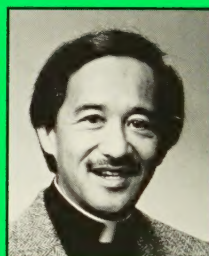
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*Fr. Basil*

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide names of author(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## FAIRNESS TO FAMILIES OF ORIGIN

**R**eading the newspapers in Australia a few weeks ago gave me a glimpse of the way a large segment of that country's population looks upon fads that originate in the United States. Aussies know that it generally takes a few years for American-invented ideas and practices to work their way into the Australian culture, provided the people of Australia are ready and willing to adopt them. Columnists for many down-under newspapers and magazines frequently serve as watchdogs by alerting readers to new and unusual concepts that are beginning to drift their way.

Recently, with considerable ridicule and cynicism, several Australian columnists have been appraising the contemporary American enthusiasm for examining one's family of origin in an effort to understand one's personality traits, emotional patterns, and characteristic behaviors. These writers interpret this phenomenon as an ingenious American way of excusing oneself from taking responsibility for one's life by blaming parents and siblings for whatever it might be ego-protecting or self-enhancing to disown. Hearing how captivated North Americans have become by popular psychology concepts such as dysfunctional families, Myers-Briggs testing, the Enneagram, twelve-step programs, codependency, adult children of alcoholics, inner-child deficiencies, and the effects of sexual abuse in early life, the Australian public is beginning to suspect how commercialized the pursuit of self-understanding has become in the homeland of such narcissistic public luminaries as financier Donald Trump, clergyman Jim Bakker, and entertainer Madonna.

What the Australian writers have not been telling their readers—at least in the columns I had a chance to read—is that even though many in the United States have gone overboard in their enthusiasm for pop psychology (often to the neglect of their intellectual, cultural, spiritual, and moral development), hundreds of thousands of American adults have gained a true sense of freedom by discovering that their problems in handling interpersonal relationships and pursuing life goals are understandable in terms of what happened to them within their families of origin. These fortunate people, including many in seminaries and religious houses of formation, have found a way, through strenuous efforts in individual psychotherapy or group therapy, to divest themselves of self-destructive psychological and social habits and to attain the peace, hope, love, and joy that were long denied them.

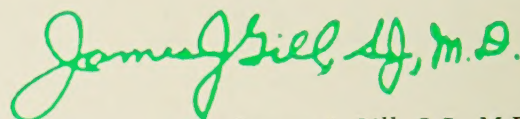
People in other parts of the world would be well advised to learn from our American experience that oversimplified theory and financial exploitation are certain to be found when inadequately trained and unsupervised “helpers” use the practice of psychology to inflate their own egos and bank accounts at the expense of the gullible. But it is also important, now as always, to heed the wise old aphorism, “Be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

I hope that all of us who strive to achieve the full development of our human potentialities keep in mind that not just many of our personality flaws and limitations were developed in reaction to the way we were treated within our families of origin; so were most of the good qualities and the effective patterns of behavior that have enabled us to function successfully throughout our lifetimes. If, for example, one's life history includes significant traces of piety, perseverance, creativity, generosity, or fidelity, one would do well to give fitting credit



to one's family for helping one to develop such traits. I would propose that as a sign of intelligence and maturity, all of us who devote time to exploring the wounds we suffered from infancy onward should spend an equal amount of time carefully reflecting on the good qualities that were fostered in our personalities early in life through interaction with our parents and siblings. Such realism is mentally healthful and an antidote to the blaming and resentment that makes the lives of too many adults from somewhat dysfunctional families even more emotionally painful *after* they have done their self-help reading and attended self-focused work-

shops (sorties into the kind of psychology that attracts but biases their thinking). Any theory or practice that promotes an attitude of condemnation and ill will in relation to one's own family members is hardly capable of being therapeutic and hardly compatible with being Christian.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

## Magnesium's Importance Increasingly Recognized

**P**eople are going to be hearing a lot more about magnesium during the years just ahead. Physicians are beginning to appreciate how important it is for their patients to become familiar with this essential substance and to make sure that it is included in their diet in adequate quantity. The healthy body contains only about one ounce of magnesium, 99 percent of which is active within cells in the brain, heart, and skeletal muscle. The remaining 1 percent circulating in the bloodstream is measured to determine whether a deficiency exists. A low blood level of magnesium, now recognized as a common problem, particularly among the elderly, is technically known as hypomagnesemia. Consequences of a short supply range all the way from impaired athletic performance to potentially dangerous heart-rhythm abnormalities.

Magnesium plays an important role in the function of a variety of cellular enzymes. Scientific research has shown that people who consume greater amounts of it in their diet or by drinking hard water are less likely to develop cardiovascular disease or to experience sudden death than those with a lower magnesium intake. Several studies suggest that a low blood level of magnesium may contribute to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis); it may also raise blood pressure or trigger cardiac arrhythmias. These rhythm disorders can usually be controlled or prevented with magnesium replacement therapy. Long-distance runners, rowers, and bodybuilders find that taking magnesium pills reduces the number of muscle cramps they experience.

The normal way of maintaining the body's supply of magnesium is through one's diet. Foods that are rich in magnesium include grains, dried fruits, shellfish, cocoa, legumes, and nuts. These are not heavily represented in the ordinary diet of most Americans. The *Harvard Heart Letter* has reported that "vegetarians and persons living in the Orient ingest much more magnesium than the average American does, which may in part explain the lower incidence of heart disease found in these groups."

Elderly persons are at the greatest risk for hypomagnesemia. Doctors have found that the most common cause of magnesium loss among patients with cardiovascular problems (e.g., heart failure, high blood pressure) is treatment with diuretics. Medications such as hydrochlorothiazide and furosemide increase the amount of urine produced by the kidneys and are thus likely to deplete the body's supply of magnesium and potassium. Persons who consume alcohol heavily are also likely to excrete magnesium excessively, and this is thought to contribute to the heart-rhythm abnormalities commonly encountered in alcoholics.

Taking in too much magnesium is hardly ever a problem, since kidneys that function normally are able to eliminate excessive amounts of the substance quickly. Physicians generally advise patients with low magnesium levels to eat magnesium-rich foods and reduce alcohol consumption. Changing medications for hypertension and heart failure is often helpful, as is taking magnesium supplements under the guidance of a physician.



# Envy: A Longing For Wholeness

Noreen Cannon, C.S.J., Ph.D.

**E**nvoy is one of the most difficult emotions to experience and integrate. Yet there is no passion so strongly rooted in the human heart. Envy is the felt conviction that "anything I need will be withheld from me, so I will spoil or destroy the one who has what I lack." The capacity for envy is in everyone, but people's susceptibility to it varies greatly and is determined early in life. This article is intended to help those who suffer from envy. For both the envier and the envied, making sense out of the chaos that this emotion breeds is a tremendous challenge that often ends in defeat, leaving behind a painful confusion that never gets resolved. Recognizing envy and understanding its meaning is a necessary first step for those who must deal with envy's disruptive consequences. Without this kind of awareness we can easily become unwitting victims of our own or others' envy.

The Christian tradition, recognizing the evil inherent in envy, ranks it as one of the seven capital sins. Psychoanalysts give envy a primary place in analysis because they believe it underlies many of the problems in human relationships, causing rifts between spouses, siblings, friends, and nations. Despite the importance given envy in both Christian spirituality and psychology, most of us rarely recognize our own envy or, if we do, are loath to acknowledge it. Instead, we treat it as a poison that can be locked away in a cupboard, out of sight and out of reach, where it can do no harm. Perhaps this

reflects the human tendency to hide the dark aspects of ourselves, particularly those that make us feel small and ashamed. But, like it or not, envy is present in the daily lives of ordinary people.

The other day I found a package in my mailbox. When I opened it I found a Christmas present from a family in the parish. Attached to it was a note from one of the nuns who lives in the parish convent: "Sorry this is so late. My fault" (name signed). Since this was the middle of the year, I was quite shocked. I live only a few blocks from her, and she had held on to that present for months, depriving me of the feelings of love and gratitude intended by the givers and preventing me from expressing my appreciation to them in return. I felt outraged that she would do such a thing. At the same time, I suspected from previous dealings with her that this was the only way she could express her envy and that I was impotent in the face of her unconscious acting out. I also sensed that she was a deeply troubled woman who hid her pain behind a persona of childlike goodness, quick to respond to the needs of people in order to feel valued but never really being taken seriously by others. Underneath the mask of sweetness she seemed angry and hurt, a victim of her own envious despair. Her withholding of the gift is a graphic example of how envy tries to spoil other people's good fortune.

All of us fall into envy in one way or another and are contaminated by its poison—sometimes as en-



viars, other times as the envied. And yet, as common and potentially harmful as envy is, it is the least discussed and least understood of emotions. As is true for the shadow side of life in general, envy is most destructive when it runs its natural course, untamed by conscious recognition and moral choice. In its raw form, uninfluenced by concerns for human love and relatedness, envy can destroy relationships of any and every kind. Psychiatrist Carl Jung, who wrote extensively about the destructive power of unexplored emotions, believed that becoming aware of these emotions and understanding their meaning can transform them into constructive energies for life-affirming goals. If we look closely at the emotion of envy, we discover two things. First, envy expresses both a deep longing for, and a despair of ever receiving, the good things of life. The envious person tries to take from others what he or she longs for. Second, envy is always found wherever gratitude is absent. While gratitude produces love, envy generates hate. Recognizing envy for what it is can be an opportunity for growth and healing.

### INVOLVES HATEFUL INTENTIONS

The root of the word *envy* is *invidere* or *invidia*, meaning "to look with malice or resentment . . . to begrudge." Webster's dictionary defines envy as "a painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage." To complete this definition, psychologists would add: "and the desire to destroy the one who is seen to possess the advantage." Envy is based on a belief that goodness is a limited commodity. If someone else has a lot of it, there is less for me. Jealousy and envy are often confused. Envy is the pain at seeing another have what I want for myself, whereas jealousy is the fear that I will lose what I have. The envious person feels angry when another person enjoys something desirable and wants to take it away or to spoil it. Jealousy, however, is mainly concerned with love. The jealous person fears losing a loved one to a rival.

The case of a middle-aged man who shared his story on a retreat may make the distinction between jealousy and envy clear. While mortified to have to own up to feelings of jealousy and envy, he felt that they were interfering with his ability to pray. Frustrated, he confessed that he is usually so angry that he cannot even go through the motions of prayer. And it was clear to him that jealousy and envy, like destructive arsonists, were responsible for continually fanning the flames of his anger. He admitted that he is so jealous regarding his wife that he is at times in torment when he discovers her talking with another man. His wife is aware of his possessive jealousy, which has driven their marriage to the brink of divorce. He is also envious of other men, with whom he continually compares

himself. He resents their superior training and education, larger cars, better positions, better looks, skills, popularity, and so on. Any of these can inflict keen suffering on him at any given time.

Portraying the drama that envy can create in human relationships, literary works supply helpful data for exploring the dynamics of envy. For example, the biblical stories of Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, and the prodigal son, as well as the fairytale of Cinderella, illustrate the destructive potential of envy and reflect its hateful intentions. Cain, consumed with envy because Yahweh favored his brother, Abel, was driven to fratricide (Gen. 4:1-8). Joseph was the victim of his brothers' jealousy when they saw that "Israel loved Joseph more than all of his other sons . . . and [they] came to hate [Joseph] so much that they could not say a civil word to him" (Gen. 37:3-4). Moreover, Joseph's dreams portending a future of prominence and power ignited the hatred of his brothers and converted their jealousy into murderous envy. The elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son demonstrates how a person's perception that someone else is receiving more of "the good" can result in resentment and envy. In response to his father's plea for understanding, he argues: "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property—he and his women—you kill the calf we have been fattening" (Luke 15:29-30). Finally, the fairytale of Cinderella exemplifies another facet of envy—that one's natural beauty and endowments can evoke envy in those who feel inferior. In this story, a beautiful young woman becomes the target of attack by her envious stepmother and stepsisters, who take delight in making her suffer.

To fully understand the perplexing emotion of envy, it is necessary to see how it originates in a recognition of something good. Whenever we perceive something outside ourselves to be a good, we are attracted to it. We feel a desire to be close to the valued object or to possess it. This is the case whether the good is another person, a material object, a beauty of nature, or a valued trait such as happiness or generosity. Envy is intrinsically related to goodness. It stems from a deep longing for the good and a corresponding despair of attaining it. What we each come to value and desire as good is determined by our own unique personality. What is desirable to one person may not be so to another. Envy enters the picture when people despair of ever achieving the good things they desire. Such frustration and despair are fertile soil for envy, which flourishes wherever hope is lacking. The suffering people experience is manifested in the envy they feel when they see another succeed, or in the pleasure they secretly take at another's failure.



## DYNAMICS OF ENVY

Envy is the result of not recognizing and feeling the depths of the pain that being human can involve. To be human is to have pockets of emptiness that endlessly hunger for fulfillment. Saint Augustine's prayer, "Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in You," expresses the truth about the deep yearning of our being that leaves us always incomplete and forever pining for more. It is precisely this infinite dimension of our desires that keeps us longing for fulfillment. When we are not aware of this and do not consciously embrace our human condition, we become frustrated and angry. Envy enters our hearts when we deny the depths of our yearning as creatures destined to find completeness only in divine love. Envy makes us think that "if only we had such and such, we would finally feel complete." But eventually, as experience repeatedly bears out, disillusionment sets in, and we come to hate the very thing we thought would satisfy us. Instead of accepting limitation and loss as part of life, the envious think that others always have more and that no one ever gives to them. Envious people fixate so much on what others have that they fail to focus on what they themselves need and want. This lack of self-awareness impedes their taking responsibility for their own lives. They come to believe that others are to blame for what they are missing, and they get angry. Blaming others activates feelings of victimization and self-righteous revenge in the envious, who now want others to pay for making them feel so bad. What begins as their own suffering gradually becomes something that someone else has done to them. The emptiness and longing that they once felt are replaced by resentment and rage. And those who possess what they desire become the enemy whose happiness is at their expense.

## ORIGINS IN EARLY LIFE

Envy is thought to have its roots in early childhood when we are at our neediest as helpless and dependent infants. Incapable of taking care of any of our own needs, we are most vulnerable to emotional and physical deprivation. Child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein believes that envy is born out of this total sense of dependency and that infants spontaneously feel envy toward the mother, whom they experience as all-powerful and able to give or withhold what they need. Thus, Shakespeare's intuition is not without psychological foundation when he states in *Romeo and Juliet* that a person can be stricken early "As is the bud bit with an envious worm, / Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air, / Or dedicate his beauty to the sun."

How envious we are as adults goes back to our experience of mother as giving or withholding. According to Klein, when the scale of need satisfac-

tion versus need deprivation is tipped in the direction of satisfaction, the infant survives the envy stage with a healthy capacity to give and receive love. When the scale is tipped in the opposite way, due either to the insatiability of the infant's needs or to severe maternal deprivation, the child's predominant emotional experience is that of being empty rather than full. This experience, Klein believes, damages one's capacity to love. A sense of defeat and despair grows, eventually resulting in a personality that is prone to envy. Early in life, then, we learn through our experiences of need satisfaction and need deprivation either to appreciate the good or to hate it and attack those whom we perceive as possessing it.

## DEFENSES AGAINST ENVY

There are numerous defenses that we can use to deal with envy. In her classic work *Envy and Gratitude*, Klein suggests that there are so many as to make it impossible to list them all. Most of these defenses are unconscious and serve to protect us from the painful exposure and retaliation we fear our envy will evoke. The most common of these are familiar to all of us, although we may not have thought of them as disguises for envy.

**Idealization.** Strongly exalting loved ones and their gifts can be an attempt to lessen envy. Often we feel envious of a person we admire, especially when that person seems to have and be all that we are not. If the envy is very strong, however, this overvaluing may in time turn into hatred because it makes us feel inferior.

**Devaluation.** Spoiling and devaluing are inherent in envy. Once I have devalued something, my envious feelings disappear. This inevitably happens to anything or anyone we idealize. Sooner or later the idealization breaks down and gives way to disillusionment. How soon an idealization breaks down depends on the strength of the envy behind it. For some people, this tendency to spoil characterizes their important relationships throughout their lives, and they go from one relationship to the next, repeatedly disillusioned and disappointed.

**Confusion.** Inherent in envy is a sense of despair about ever being able to attain what one most needs and wants. Thus, someone who is overwhelmed by futility can experience great difficulty in making choices, both in weighty matters such as vocational and career decisions and in lesser matters such as what to select from a restaurant menu. Indecision and unclear thinking, which are characterized by not being able to arrive at conclusions, are sometimes rooted in envious despair about ever being able to successfully achieve one's desires. In this way, envy can result in inactivity or procrastination.



**Poor Self-Image.** Devaluation of self or low self-esteem is another way in which envious feelings are avoided. This type of spoiling and devaluing is most characteristic of people who are prone to depression. It may result in a lifelong inability to develop and successfully use our gifts, or it may arise only on certain occasions (e.g., when there is danger of rivalry with an important person). By devaluing our own gifts and depriving ourselves of success, we both avoid the pain of feeling envy and punish ourselves for it.

**Greed.** Envy, stemming from severe early childhood deprivation, leads to a neurotic inability ever to feel satisfied. Persons afflicted in such a way feel that "what I have and who I am is never enough." To compensate for this feeling, they may be driven to want or to take all that they can get, whether in the form of material or spiritual goods. Perfectionism and professionalism can be manifestations of this tendency when they involve an endless pursuit of reassuring successes and achievements.

**Making Others Envious.** Stirring up envy in others by flaunting one's own success or possessions is a way of reversing the situation in which envy is experienced. The desire to make others envious and to triumph over them express both the hostility and the deep helplessness that characterize the inner world of the envious. An attitude of superiority or a tendency to brag about one's good fortune are common masks for envy.

**Hatred and Indifference.** Another frequent defense against envy is to stifle feelings of love and to fuel feelings of hate. The envious person is confused by the mixture of love, hate, and envy that inevitably arises in close relationships and cannot tolerate the ambivalence that results. One way to avoid this inner conflict is by denying the love. This may be expressed in either outright hatred or in the appearance of indifference. Withholding warmth and other manifestations of human kindness is a subtle form of revenge against those we envy.

**Withdrawal.** A variation of indifference is found in the allied defense of withdrawal from contact with others. Excessive independence often masks a fear of envy and defends against it by avoiding experiences that will give rise to both envy and gratitude. The inability to ask for or to receive help from others is often seen as a sign of strength rather than a problem with envy.

**Destructive Criticism.** Malicious gossip, backbiting, and other forms of tearing people down are among the most common, everyday expressions of envy. The envious person feels unhappy at the sight of others' happiness and finds satisfaction and even joy in their misfortune. Discrediting or maligning

the reputations of others is a widely recognized expression of envy.

**Victims of Envy.** A professionally successful and popular nun recounted the horror of being the scapegoated victim of her dysfunctional community. What finally convinced her that envy was at the heart of the problem was the group's refusal to cooperate when a trained facilitator was brought in. No one would talk. After months of unsuccessful meetings she realized that unconscious envy is impossible to deal with and asked for a transfer.

The above example illustrates how the envied person can be victimized. He or she feels attacked, threatened, and helpless. The envied may try to talk to the envier, to reason with him or her, even to try to prove that there is really nothing to be envied. As a last resort the envied may withdraw completely from any relationship with the envier. Victims of envy finally realize that there is nothing they can do to help the situation, because it is not a fault or a particular virtue that is provoking the hatred but their very being.

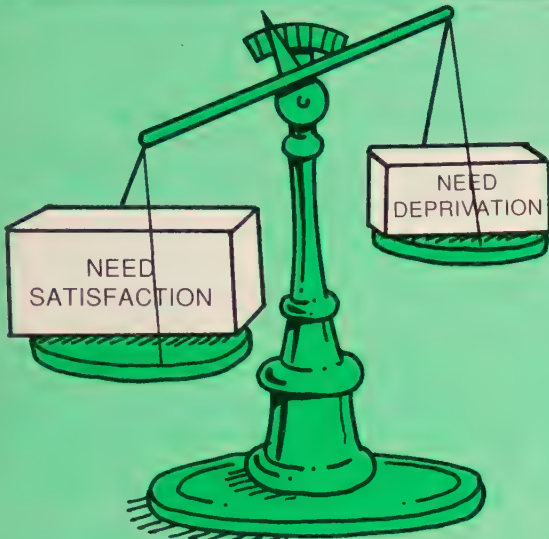
Victims of the envious attacks of others may react with a variety of responses. If they feel angry about being persecuted, counterattack is the most likely reaction, and they can become as destructive and hateful as the envier. Another response is to allow the envy to infect them. This happens if they internalize the blame projected on them and then feel guilty for being who they are. This was the case with a dynamic pastoral associate who was the unwitting victim of the envy of other staff members and came to believe that he was as bad as his envious colleagues asserted. The result was a complete denial of the parts of his personality that had brought about their envy. Only after several years of therapy was he able to undo the damage and to regain the courage to be himself. His painful experience taught him what all of envy's victims need to realize: to capitulate to the envious perceptions of others is to jeopardize one's very sense of self and to betray valuable parts of oneself. The temptation to abandon oneself is strongly felt by victims of envy because of the suffering that this kind of persecution brings. Much courage is required to embrace the parts of oneself that trigger envy in others. Often it seems easier to disown or devalue one's talents or successes in an attempt to defuse the painful onslaughts of the envious.

## ENVY IN GROUP LIFE

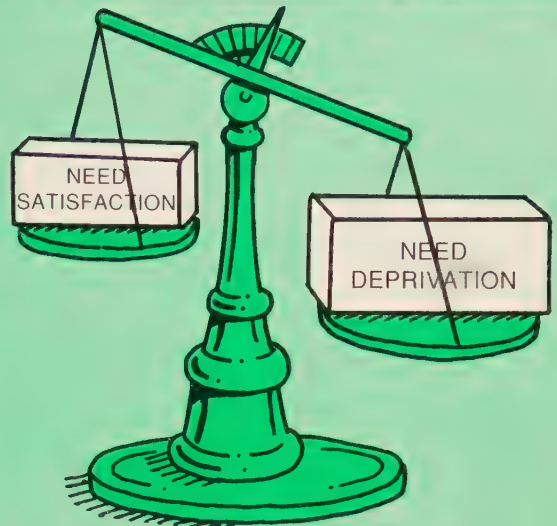
Special attention should be given to the effects of envy in group life, since most of us live and work in groups of one type or another. Many years of facilitating groups of all kinds lead me to believe that unconscious envy is often at the heart of group conflicts. Seldom is a group created equal; inequality of natural gifts is inevitable. Such inequality,



# Infant's Experience Affects Adult Envy



Infant perceives mother as giving; develops capacity to give and receive love.



Infant perceives mother as withholding; develops inclination to react with envy.

however, need not generate envy if the individuals are secure and confident enough to appreciate that each person has something valuable to offer. When this is the case, "We do not have to be or do it all," as Jungian analysts Ann and Barry Ulanov point out in their study of envy, *Cinderella and Her Sisters: The Envied and the Envyng*. "We can depend on others to supply what we lack, and be glad for their abilities and talents," they write, "for together we make up a whole, and a desirable one."

When low self-esteem characterizes a group, we can expect that envy will rear its ugly head and be directed at any member who stands out because of some success or good fortune. Thus, celebrations of promotions, jubilees, weddings, anniversaries, and birthdays can occasion envious comparisons. Those who feel that no one ever gives to them or treats them as special may feel particularly resentful when others are honored.

Envy poisons group life. By polluting the atmosphere with their resentful feelings and undermining others' efforts to live cooperatively, envious individuals in a community have a destructive influence on the whole group. They can sow seeds of dissension by secretly spreading rumors that foster mistrust, pitting people against each other and creating triangles.

Coping with the problems that come with group living requires more than faith and good intentions. If group members do not possess the skills for effective communication and conflict management, they will not be able to avoid the damage that envy can cause. Several envious people in a community can destroy the life of the whole group. A common way this occurs is through scapegoating: a few people consciously or unconsciously collude to designate one member as "the problem" and to convince the others of this. Systems theorists have demonstrated this dynamic quite convincingly in their work with families who have a "problem child." By treating the family group as a system, they are able to unearth the alliances and conflicts that exist in and among its members. By helping each family member learn how to communicate about his or her needs and feelings, they eliminate the need for a scapegoat. In religious communities, the tendency to create group norms such as "being nice" and sweeping conflicts under the rug paves the way for scapegoating by preventing members from voicing their feelings and airing their conflicts. An example of this occurred in a community that resolved its conflicts by scapegoating a different member every year. On the surface there was a pretense of unity and cooperation. Those outside



the community thought it a model group. The truth, however, was revealed in the scapegoating. The group was never able to develop a meaningful prayer life or to communicate on more than a superficial level.

Envy in group life can show itself in less dramatic ways than scapegoating. Gossip, negativity (toward authority or peers who stand out in some way), and the withholding of affirmation and support are common ways in which group members can express their envy of each other. The inability to receive help from other group members or to express gratitude genuinely may also mask feelings of envy. Finally, envy in group life is sometimes reflected in the negative way that younger members may be treated by their elders. It is often painful for the aging to accept the increasing signs of their diminishment. Failure to embrace these inevitable losses creates resentment that drives a wedge of envy between the old and the young, preventing them from enjoying the good that they have to give each other.

### PROJECTING ONE'S SHADOW

Envious persons refuse the call to actualize their God-given potential. Their preoccupation with what they do not have and their obsession with what others have blind them to what is their own. The unique gifts that are theirs go unrecognized and are thus lost to them. The very things that could give them substance and enhance their sense of being fall into the shadow, the psychic storehouse for all the disowned aspects of the personality. And because whatever is in the shadow gets projected onto others, the envious see their own neglected potentials reflected in those around them. This is why they resentfully believe that others have what belongs to them. Psychologically, it is true—not because others have taken it but because the envious person has unconsciously projected it onto them.

A couple of examples might help to illustrate how this happens. A woman attending a faculty party with a friend finds herself feeling miserable as the evening progresses. She notices how relaxed and vivacious her friend is and how others naturally gravitate toward her. In contrast, she sees herself as a wallflower, self-consciously shy and fearful, and wishes she could be more spontaneous. Sometimes she resents her friend for always being the center of attention. She judges her as insensitive and selfish. But deep down, she knows the truth: she is envious and would give anything to be her. The moral of this story is not that the wallflower should try to imitate her extroverted friend but that she needs to explore the unconscious fears that prevent her from moving out toward others as she secretly desires.

In different cases of envy, people find themselves

obsessing over others' material possessions. A self-made businessman, for example, is envious of his neighbor who owns a larger business and a new Mercedes. He feels inferior to his neighbor, whose wealth and power exceed his own. That he is a successful husband and father seem unimportant to him because he believes that a man's worth is measured by money and prestige. Because of the symbolic importance he has placed on these things in recent years, he has lost his appreciation of the family life that was once his first priority and source of happiness. That which formerly provided a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction has been lost. To overcome his envy, he has to turn within and reconnect with what is most important to him.

Envy can trap the envious in a vicious circle because those around them unconsciously reinforce their low self-esteem. When we are with those who do not value themselves, we begin to devalue them too. Their self-deprecation has a way of coloring our perception of them. We tend to shy away from envious people whose deficient or inflated self-image makes them poor company. Their unhappiness may make us feel guilty and apologetic because we think that we should not be happy or take pride in our accomplishments. At times, we may also find ourselves uncomfortable around them because we sense that they covet who we are and what we have.

### A SPIRITUAL VIEWPOINT

While psychology and literature offer valuable insights into the nature and dynamics of envy, a spiritual point of view offers some hope for the healing of envy. Looked at spiritually, envy represents a refusal to accept the human condition, particularly one's finiteness as a creature. While few of us find self-acceptance easy, the envier finds it impossible. The experience of being limited, of being imperfect and incomplete, is intolerable to the envious, who feel that they have nothing because they do not have everything. Focusing on what others have that they lack, the envious succumb to self-betrayal by preferring the being of others to their own. The spiritual failure of envy lies in the fact that self-rejection is also a rejection of God, who uniquely fashions each of us, right down to the number of hairs on our heads. As theologian Johannes Metz states in *Poverty of Spirit*, "self-acceptance is the basis of the Christian creed. Assent to God starts with [our] own sincere assent to [ourselves], just as sinful flight from God starts with [our] flight from [ourselves]." Ann and Barry Ulanov identify Satan as the archetypal envier because he could not accept his rightful place in the order of creation. That he was not God was intolerable to him, so he turned against God, creating a kingdom of his own wherein he could reign. Making the same point, Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, de-



clares that envious rebellion entered the world through Satan: "The infernal serpent; he it was, whose guile, / Stirr'd up with envy and revenge, deceived / The mother of mankind."

Another sin associated with envy is the sin of sloth, or laziness. "Envy, which springs from an emptiness of being," state the Ulanovs, makes us "lonely, weak and slothful about own own gifts." In rejecting the being God has given them, enviers neglect the responsibility of developing their own gifts. Anyone who has spent years in developing a talent or honing a skill knows the discipline involved. To cultivate seriously our gifts and talents in preparation for a career that matches our potential requires hard work.

## TRANSFORMATION OF ENVY

While it is important to analyze the psychological roots of envy, the healing of envy requires that we see its spiritual dimensions. At its core, envy harms our relationship to God as well as our relationship to ourselves and others. As a radical refusal to accept ourselves as we are, envy is sinful. Satan is the archetypal envier because he could not accept himself. Dissatisfied with his state, he allowed his envy to sever his relationship with God. Defying his creaturehood and striving for divine status created an attitude problem that he was unwilling to face and change.

The healing of envy requires a fundamental shift in attitude. First, envy must be seen for what it is—a sinful and spiritually destructive reality that calls for genuine conversion. Second, freedom from envy can come only when we recognize that as Christians we are meant to be always in longing until that day when God becomes our all in the heavenly Jerusalem, where there will be no more tears and mourning. Christian spirituality invites us to see the poverty that we experience as creatures not as a negative void to be lamented but as a rich vacancy for God, who alone can satisfy our being. Third, concrete efforts must be made to examine the conditions that lead to envy. Only an awareness of how envy plays itself out in our personal life can bring about the capacity to escape its deleterious effects. For some of us what is needed is merely a redirection of our gaze to highlight the giftedness and goodness that we actually possess. Since envy is admiration gone sour, the solution to envy may be as simple as reawakening our capacity for wonder and appreciation. For others, however, whose envy is deep-seated and rooted in severe childhood deprivation, the help of

a therapist may be required. Both the wallflower and the businessman mentioned earlier may eventually find themselves in this position. Like the woman in Luke's gospel who is in search of a lost coin, they must have the determination to search actively within for what they have lost.

Envy can be a catalyst for transformation. When the needs and desires that it conceals are acknowledged, envy can point us in the direction of the good that we long for. Learning to detect in the swirl of envious feelings the precise need that longs for satisfaction is a critical step in discovering the grace hidden in the experience. Clear recognition of what it is that we need can direct our efforts in positive and constructive action. Envy is not something to be ashamed of, but rather a valuable messenger that should be heeded. Shame leads to denial, and denial obscures the message. When we can see our envy as a longing for wholeness, we can respond to ourselves with compassion and love. Forgiving our envy opens us to seeing the goodness that is ours. Thus the transformation of envy begins. Grace comes to us when we begin to appreciate the good that is already ours, even if what we possess does not include every possible good in human life. When we can do this we come alive to the fact that God has indeed been gracious to us. As our experience of the good expands, so will our sense of gratitude, and envy will start to shrink. Then, with the psalmist, we can pray: "It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb; for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works" (Psalm 139:13–14).

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Klein, M. *Envy and Gratitude*. London, England: Tavistock Publications, 1957.
- Metz, J. *Poverty of Spirit*. New York, New York: Paulist Press, 1968.
- Ulanov, A., and B. Ulanov. *Cinderella and Her Sisters: The Envied and the Envyng*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1983.



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# Neurotic Personalities in Religious Settings

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

**I**n *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, Karen Horney proposed that each age is characterized by a certain neurotic pattern that results from the interaction of individual early life experiences and dominant cultural influences. The dominant cultural ethic of the pre-World War II era was characterized by stability, other-directedness, and status-consciousness, which favored the development of an adjusted obsessive-compulsive neurotic pattern. Today our culture is much less homogeneous than it was in earlier eras: for some it is relatively stable and success-oriented, whereas it is chaotic and self-focused for others. Thus, there is not simply one neurotic pattern in this era; rather, there are many.

In this article I will describe the six most common personality patterns that I have observed in religious settings from the vantage point of a consulting psychiatrist: borderline, dependent, narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive, paranoid, and passive-aggressive. I will describe the interpersonal and religious behaviors that characterize these patterns and offer some explanations as to how and why these particular patterns evolved.

Personality patterns may be thought of as stable and enduring styles of behavior that influence an individual's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and actions. Such patterns define us as the unique individuals we are. Those patterns that are healthy and adaptive are designated as personality styles. Those that are overly rigid, maladaptive, and affect others negatively are called personality disorders. To keep matters in perspective, the distinction

between a trait and a personality disorder needs to be made. Any person can manifest one or more of the traits or features of any of the personality styles without possessing the extremely rigid, compulsive, and maladaptive pattern of that style.

Is a personality disorder the same as a neurosis? Actually, there are two types of neurosis: psychoneurosis and character neurosis. Intense anxiety, pain, and suffering are experienced by those with a psychoneurosis. Persons with a character neurosis impose pain, discomfort, and suffering on others. Character neurosis is synonymous with personality disorder.

In this discussion, personality disorders are considered pathological extensions of the personality patterns. That is to say that the personality disorders emerge out of personality patterns as a result of a complex interaction of early life experiences, parenting styles, environmental stressors, maladaptive learning, and even biological predisposition. Readers will undoubtedly recognize themselves in a number of the descriptions that follow. For some, the temptation will be to discount or devalue this information because of preconceived ideas (e.g., "narcissism is always bad," "I've never been paranoid") or to wish that the personality pattern were described in "safer," more everyday language, because of some fear of being thought of as mentally unstable. I suggest that the reader keep in mind the concept of the continuum in reading about each personality style and to guard against the temptation to diagnose self or others.



## THE BORDERLINE PERSONALITY

The borderline personality can be immediately recognized by its emotional instability and relational extremes. This personality pattern is becoming increasingly present and troublesome in religious settings. Because of the perplexity and challenge the borderline personality presents, I will discuss it in greater detail than the other personality styles covered here.

Appearing emotionally stable at one moment, the borderline personality can suddenly become intensely angry, depressed, anxious, or questioning in regard to identity, goals, and values. Impulsive, unpredictable, and intense verbal outbursts and threats, as well as physical displays of temper or self-damaging acts, including suicide attempts and self-mutilation, are characteristic of this personality. Surprisingly, the emotional swings tend to be short-lived; the person returns to his or her usual state, often behaving as if nothing unusual has occurred. Characteristically unstable in relationships, the borderline individual sometimes over-idealizes another person, viewing that individual as incapable of any wrong—yet when frustrated with that person, he or she devalues that individual in the next instant. Borderline personalities have an intense fear of being alone, because when they are alone they feel incredibly empty and worthless. They can be clinging, dependent, and demanding that others should meet all their unmet needs. When others are unable or unwilling to meet these overly exaggerated expectations, the borderline personality may become enraged. Despite these symptoms, the borderline individual can be creative, intelligent, and emotionally perceptive and can function at high levels when expectations are clear and structured.

The borderline personality, most common among women, appears to be an increasing diagnostic entity, apparently because of the marked increase in family instability over the past three decades; it may also be the result of abuse and other traumas in childhood. Such conditions as drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts are common in the disordered version of this personality style.

Religious leaders can immediately relate the borderline personality pattern to members of their communities or congregations. A small parish or community may have one borderline individual, while larger parishes are likely to have several. Even one person with the disordered form of this pattern is sufficient to consume the energies of an entire pastoral team. Communities with an emphasis on love and acceptance attract individuals who struggle with feelings of emptiness and isolation. Initially, the borderline personality may appear guarded in such a group. As the community persists in love and acceptance, however, the border-

line individual forms intense attachments. This individual then gives glowing testimony to the group's concern and hospitality, and the leader and the community respond by giving even more of themselves. As the demands of the borderline personality increase, however, the community feels controlled and manipulated and begins to withdraw. The borderline person plays up even more to those who have been especially giving, seeking more intense and more exclusive relationships with them. To defend against any threats to these relationships, the borderline personality uses a variety of psychological defenses. One of these is "splitting." Because they have difficulty tolerating both negative and positive feelings simultaneously for the same person, borderline individuals see others as all good or all bad. Not surprisingly, those deemed bad become targets for many of the borderline person's emotional outbursts.

Overwhelming personal charm is another common defense of the borderline personality, who may be too generous, always available, overly complementary, or prone to lavishing others with gifts, time, and praise. It is not uncommon for a borderline female to use flattery or seductiveness to obtain the attention of a male leader. When the object of her demands does not respond as desired, the borderline personality feels abandoned and overwhelmed with feelings of worthlessness.

How does this personality develop? The borderline individual often has a history of childhood abuse and trauma; the mother is often absent, neglectful, or in other ways emotionally unavailable or unpredictable. As a result, the child does not develop a secure sense of the mother as a good and caring figure. For the borderline individual, good and bad feelings have not been integrated. The normal process of development allows a child to experience both good and bad, black and white; the borderline personality has not had this integrative experience. Subsequently, rage remains unmitigated by love, and in the face of emotional turmoil other people are perceived as either all good or all bad.

The borderline personality tends to feel, "I don't know who I am or where I'm going," and so has identity problems involving self, gender, career, and basic values. This personality's view of the world is, "People are great; no, they are not. Having goals is good; no, it is not. If life doesn't go my way, I can't tolerate it." The basic life strategy becomes, "Keep all options open. Don't commit to anything. Reverse roles and vacillate in thought and feeling when under attack." The parental injunction internalized by the borderline personality in childhood was, "If you grow up and leave me, bad things will happen to me."

Not surprisingly, borderline personalities have difficulty maintaining constancy in their spiritual lives. Often, they see God as all good and them-



selves as all bad. Therefore, they cannot easily handle the feelings they have toward God. Borderline personalities frequently use spiritual discipline in a self-centered fashion. Prayer becomes a tool for getting the Lord's attention. Furthermore, the borderline personality's spiritual perception is often dependent on social experience: human rejection makes it difficult to tolerate a relationship with the Lord. Thus, the community must demonstrate human love consistently, yet within clear limits, so that the borderline individual has a framework for experiencing divine love.

### THE DEPENDENT PERSONALITY

Individuals with dependent personality styles have a pervasive need to cling to stronger personalities who are allowed to make a wide range of decisions for them. Dependent personalities can be naive, show little initiative, and appear to be superficially affable and good-natured. Often, they seem to be just a little too sweet and nice to be real. Their rose-colored outlook on life minimizes their many blunders and the shortcomings of others. They fear isolation and being alone. Thus, they hold on to their job supervisors and ministers, and cling to their marriages even in the face of abuse, infidelity, and abandonment. Because they play the inferior role so well, their partners experience themselves as useful, sympathetic, strong, and competent. Not surprisingly, these are the traits that dependent persons seek in their spouses, teachers, spiritual directors, personal friends, and therapists.

Individuals with the disordered form of this personality pattern can experience periods of clinical depression and anxiety. These episodes of depression are usually precipitated by a real loss or abandonment, such as divorce or the death of a spouse.

Psychologically, these individuals grow up viewing themselves as self-abasing, inept, and self-doubting: "I am nice but inadequate." Their view of the world is, "Others are here to take care of me because I can't do it myself." Their basic life strategy tends to be, "Cling to and rely on others at all costs." Because of these views, dependent personalities seldom develop effective skills in assertive communication, negotiation, and problem solving. As children, they were raised in families where parental overprotection was common and the parental injunction was, "You can't do anything by yourself; you need our help." They were likely to have been protected by adults as well as by siblings and peers. Not surprisingly, they expect similar care and protection as adults.

In terms of religious behavior, these individuals tend to latch on feverishly to a close-knit religious group or a strong leader. They are easily enamored of a forceful figure and will mindlessly follow his or

her directives, as did the disciples of the Reverend Jim Jones in Guyana when they committed mass suicide.

Dependent persons tend to view God as all-powerful and almighty, and themselves as insignificant beings totally at God's mercy. They may complain that because their prayers have not been answered, they fear that God is not there for them any longer. Because of their sense of inadequacy and limited experience in taking responsibility for themselves, they tend to seek out religious counselors repeatedly. They may shift their dependency to spiritual directors or counselors and make numerous telephone calls to them for reassurance between interviews. If the counselor is away on a vacation, they may feel devastated by their sense of abandonment. Not surprisingly, they may have two or more counselors at once without telling them about each other. Interviews and telephone calls are ways of reducing anxiety about the fear of separation.

### THE NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY

Along with the borderline personality, the narcissistic personality is clearly a neurotic personality of our times. Narcissistic individuals are "flat-tery-operated." More specifically, they manifest an unrealistic sense of self-importance, exhibitionistic attention-seeking, inability to take criticism, and interpersonal manipulation. Because of their self-absorption, they have difficulty showing empathy toward others and, as a result, have significant problems in interpersonal relationships. Recently, this personality pattern has become relatively common in our culture, which is pervaded by such slogans as "have it your way," "you can have it all," and "look out for number one." The narcissistic personality reflects our current societal norms and values.

Narcissists use other persons to indulge their desires. They live lives of grandly assumed entitlement, believing that what others do for them is only what they deserve and are entitled to. The personal integrity and rights of others are disregarded, while at the same time special favors are expected, assumed, or demanded.

As children, such individuals were probably viewed by others as special in terms of looks, talent, or promise. They were likely to have been precocious children with exceptional language skills and to have been keenly aware of interpersonal cues. Narcissistic personalities tend to believe, "I'm special and unique, so I'm entitled to extraordinary rights and privileges, which I don't have to earn." Similarly, their view of life is, "Life is a banquet table to be sampled at will. People owe me admiration and privilege." Consequently, their life strategy is, "I'll expect and demand specialness, even though I may not have earned it." As



children, they were indulged and overvalued by their parents. Their parental injunction probably was, "Grow up and be wonderful for me." Often, narcissists are only children and learn exploitative and manipulative behaviors from their parents.

God is not exempted from exploitation by narcissistic individuals, who tend to view God as being at their beck and call, and seek to control God. Perhaps the most difficult task for narcissists is to yield control of their world to God. Their basic spiritual deficit is a lack of awareness of grace and an incapacity for gratitude. Not surprisingly, they imagine God as an all-giving father. Furthermore, they perceive faith as a magical entreaty. They believe that God will do exactly as they ask in their prayers, with no regard to the kind of claim God has on them. In religious circles it is common to hear such persons elaborate on "what God has done for me." Such dimensions of prayer as praise, self-examination, forgiveness, and thanksgiving are often neglected.

Individuals with narcissistic personalities may have intense mystical leanings that pull them in the direction of mystical experiences, including the occult. This is understandable in light of their grandiosity, feelings of specialness, and the privileged status conferred on them by mystical pursuits. The narcissistic personality may regard himself or herself as endowed with a mystical temperament and become a devotee of meditation, yoga, parapsychology, or the occult. According to V. Siomopoulos, the narcissistic personality is more likely to experience a hypomaniclike state of self-exaltation than a true mystical state.

Wayne Oates believes that a much more serious and less easily detected aspect of this personality is the tendency to claim the infallibility of a particular religious belief. Narcissists can couch their beliefs in vociferous claims of the infallibility of a particular church, belief, or ritual. At the same time, they consider themselves exempt from the rules of conduct by which Jesus lived and the teachings by which we must abide if we would live effectively with God and neighbor. This massive exemption relieves narcissists of any need for consistency. They can do as they please in pursuing their goals of self-gratification in the name of the Lord. They can exploit other people's financial means, sexuality, social position, or anything else in order to fulfill their infallible claim. The infallibility is now theirs.

## THE OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE PERSONALITY

Obsessive-compulsive personality types are individuals preoccupied with rules and duties. They are unable to express warmth and caring except in limited situations. They are highly oriented toward a life-style characterized by productivity and efficiency, and are temperamentally and emotionally

insensitive to others. Obsessive individuals have a tendency to be perfectionists, which shows in their overattention to details, rules, and schedules. Not surprisingly, they are often workaholics. Interpersonally, they are often polite and loyal, although somewhat rigid and stuffy in their dealings with others. In our culture a certain degree of compulsion in one's work is highly esteemed and rewarded, but in the obsessive-compulsive such behavior overwhelms the personality. Individuals with this personality disorder are often indecisive and poor planners of their time as a result of their narrow focus and concern with precision even when precision may be irrelevant. They are inclined to be excessively moralistic, litigious, and hyperalert to criticism from others.

As children, obsessive-compulsive individuals tended to have parental training that taught them to be good and overly responsible in all areas of their life. Their parental injunction tended to be, "You must do and be better to be worthwhile." Psychologically, they tend to believe, "I am responsible if something goes wrong, so I have to be reliable, competent, and righteous." Typically, their worldview is, "Life is unpredictable and expects too much of me." Their life strategy becomes, "Therefore, be in control, right, and proper at all times."

The religious behavior of the obsessive-compulsive personality is unique among the personality patterns. These individuals typically imagine God as a taskmaster, judge, or police officer. Too often their prayer tends to focus on their own faults, failings, and need for forgiveness. Scrupulosity, commonly associated with the obsessive-compulsive personality, may be manifested in the reporting of tiny infractions of rules and inappropriate behaviors to a pastor or leader of a prayer community. Obsessive-compulsives see themselves as self-appointed guardians of the mores and morals of others.

Probably the most trying expression of an over-scrupulous religiosity is seen in such individuals' interpretations of certain passages of scripture. Disordered obsessive-compulsives will focus on passages that are tailor-made to their private biases—yet these passages are test cases for the acceptability of the overly scrupulous persons' worth as Christians. To them, any contradictory testimony in scripture, church tradition, or the promptings of their spiritual directors is irrelevant. In years past, when weekly confession was a common tradition among Catholics, overscrupulosity among compulsive personalities was unwittingly reinforced. Today, scrupulosity among Catholic Christians shows itself in a number of arenas besides the confessional.

Under severe levels of stress, compulsive personalities may become obsessive about religion. At first they can be filled with generalized anxiety. Then a specific scriptural passage, such as Hebrews



# A Profile of the Narcissist



- Self-absorbed
- Exaggerates own worth
- Shows no empathy
- Feels entitled
- Seeks attention
- Can't take criticism
- Loves flattery
- Expects special treatment
- Tries to control God
- Exempts self from rules
- Manipulates others
- Lacks gratitude

6:4-6, takes hold of their thoughts and tells them that they are lost because they have themselves crucified Christ. Or they feel they have sinned against the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot be forgiven. As a result they become agitated and depressed and refuse all measure of reassurance and comfort. In such instances they are beyond rational persuasion, may be clinically depressed, and may even experience suicidal thoughts. Competent and compassionate pastoral care of such individuals includes psychiatric referral.

## THE PARANOID PERSONALITY

Paranoid individuals are typically suspicious, resentful, and hostile. They tend to respond with anger to anything that even approaches ridicule, deception, deprecation, or betrayal. As a result they are chronically tense and vigilant. They tend to be slow to warm up to others and tend to avoid the expression of feelings and intimacy. Being dependent on others is detested by the paranoid personality, not only because dependence signifies weakness and inferiority but also because these individuals are not able to trust anyone. Not surprisingly, they can be moralistic, prone to grandiose ideas, and extra punitive, and they are overrepresented among leaders of religious, pseudoscientific, and quasi-political groups.

Paranoid individuals tend to have had at least one parent who thought of them as special yet treated them with harshness, overcontrol and rigidity, or overevaluation. Furthermore, the parental injunction under which they were raised was, "You're special and different—but be careful." They tend to believe, "I'm special and different, and I'm alone because I'm better than others." Their world view tends to be, "Life is unfair, unpredictable, and demanding. It can sneak up and harm you when you least expect it." Their life strategy becomes, "Be wary, trust no one, counter-attack, and excuse yourself from failure by blaming others."

Their religious bearing reflects this sense of wariness. God is likely to be imaged as a police officer or judge. The paranoid style tends to be most common among men. Paranoid individuals can be successful leaders in competitive fields (e.g., business, management). They impress others with their rapier wit and quickness to point out others' errors, particularly regarding "heresy" in community teachings.

Earlier it was suggested that the authoritarian religious leader is in large part narcissistic. However, the grandiosity of the paranoid personality is usually saturated with narcissism. The moralistic and grandiose ideation of the paranoid can be recognized in certain kinds of religious leaders, even within mainline religious groups. For exam-



ple, a leader of a local congregation may find himself or herself constantly involved in ongoing conflict with other leadership. Normally, the leader would be expected to face and resolve conflicts with superiors so that the congregation or the community could go on with its basic functions. Most paranoid leaders, however, are more likely to form splinter groups and leave the larger bodies to begin new communities in which they have the final say in all matters.

## THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITY

Passive-aggressive individuals follow a strategy of negativism, defiance, and provocation and are unable to make up their minds as to whether to adhere to the demands of others or to resist their demands. Consequently, their behavior is characterized by both passivity and aggressiveness. They appear to be ambivalent about everything and cannot decide whether to be dependent or independent, or whether to respond to situations actively or passively. They constantly struggle with the dilemma of whether to submit or assert themselves. Passive-aggressives resolve this dilemma by expressing resistance indirectly through procrastination, stubbornness, inefficiency, and forgetfulness. Afraid to show anger openly, they displace it onto others. An aura of agreeableness and cordiality usually masks their negativistic resistance. They may smilingly agree to do something with no intention of following through.

Passive-aggressive individuals were most likely exposed to a parenting style notable for its inconsistency. Because of this inconsistency they did not develop enough confidence and emotional stability to accurately assess what was expected of them. At times these individuals experienced severe and harsh discipline for a particular infraction, while on other occasions they received little or no discipline for the same infraction. Consequently, they tend to believe, "I am competent but not really competent" and other such contradictory phrases. They tend to think that "life is a big bind. It's unfair, unpredictable, and unappreciative." Their life strategy becomes, "It's safer to vacillate, temporize, oppose, and anticipate disappointment and betrayal rather than to make a commitment."

How do passive-aggressive personalities function in religious settings? Basically, they give the impression of being committed and cooperative individuals, when in fact they sabotage the progress of the community. They are ambivalent about commitment and they engage in negative cooperation, meaning that what they agree to do never seems to get completed, or their performance leaves much to be desired.

They tend to hold harsh and unloving images of God, and their pessimistic spiritual outlook mirrors the rest of their rather unhappy, unproductive

lives. Not surprisingly, obedience is not their strong suit, as they basically distrust and resent authority. They are exasperating to other members of the community as well as to leaders, particularly because they excuse their own shortcomings and blame them on others. These individuals have a reputation of being "spiritual sourpusses" and lead lives of quiet spiritual desperation. Unfortunately, religious structures have unwittingly fostered passive-aggressivity by emphasizing control, avoidance of conflict, and suppression and denial of anger.

## STYLES VS. DISORDERS

Personality patterns are of two types: styles and disorders. The disordered pattern, originally called the character neurosis, is rigid and maladaptive and negatively impacts others. That is, others experience varying degrees of anger and suffering as a result of relating to disordered personalities. Second, we each have our own mix of personality patterns that makes us unique. Where we are on the continuum between personality styles and personality disorders is a matter of choice. Psychotherapy and spiritual growth can transform disordered patterns into healthy styles. Third, the biblical correlate of the personality-disordered is the individual with a "hardened heart." Fourth, the more rigid and disordered people are, the more they adopt rigid conceptual categories and ideologies, and "need" simple answers to complex problems and issues. They also adopt rigid behavior patterns, particularly compulsive behaviors. Finally, it appears that the passive-aggressive personality is the most prevalent within religious settings.

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# God Help Us, Irish

*James Torrens, S.J.*

country I've never been  
much of me grew up there  
personal as a pub or parish  
gossip its business  
forum for darts and sallies  
razor strap for the language  
an island world  
and footloose imaginings  
women its higher caste  
too estimable to hug  
a field strewn with the poor  
an instinct for how it is  
green because it rains  
a memory that won't let go  
unruly, peacekeeping  
profane, with their roots in God  
a chalice turns up in the earth  
all is sold for it

A visit to Ellis Island, reopened just last fall in New York Harbor as a museum of the immigrants of 1892 to 1924, is deeply stirring. The cavernous reception hall and medical cottages, the moving-picture footage, the countless photos and donated effects, the names engraved on the sea-wall—all make you more conscious of where you came from and why you are like you are.

My own forebears, Irish and Italian and French, came over before the Ellis Island days. I became ambivalent about the Irish part of my heritage. This was probably an adverse reaction to that home industry of selling the Green and, even more, to the insistently Irish stamp of the American church. I find myself now with a better feeling, a much truer sense of roots, thanks to Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*, a long, crowded, but orderly account of the potato famine (Old Town Books, 1989).

Most of us on the planet today have been riveted by those photographs, by Sebastiao Salgado and others, of the famine-stricken in Ethiopia and Sudan. What a shock to realize that these pathetic skeletons, the skin and bones with the staring eyes and bloated bellies, were exactly what would have met us in Skibbereen, County Cork, or Erris and Ballina, County Mayo, in the winter and spring of 1846–47. "Attenuation seems to have absorbed all appearance of flesh or muscle," wrote Sidney Godolphin Osborne. A visitor to Westport and Clifden



(Mayo) reported finding “the streets crowded with gaunt wanderers . . . , more like famished dogs than fellow creatures.”

## ORIGINATED IN GERMANY

What had happened? In 1830 a new disease, a potato blight, had appeared in Germany; in 1842 it ruined the potato crop in New England and Nova Scotia; it broke out in Europe in 1845, and in the following summer it “turned the potato fields of Ireland black almost overnight.” As late as 1958 in this century, in the face of pesticides, the blight has struck hard. Its cause, detected only in 1860, is a fungus, *Phytophthora infestans* (“swarming plant-killer”). Ireland—particularly in the west, with its continual light rains and mild breezes—is “an ideal forcing house for blight.” And the Irish, when it first hit them, were dependent on one crop. What other grains or foods they raised in their feudal system went on the market to pay their rent to the landowners.

Truly, like Job, the Irish could have asked (and did) that year, What has God got against us? When paupers went wandering the roads, when families were rousted en masse out of their cabins in default of rent, then it was that snow and sleet hit them in the worst winter on record. The poor were kindly disposed to receiving their own, an egalitarian trait and charitable impulse the Irish have not lost. “An Irishman,” wrote the Central Board of Health, “thinks himself accursed if he refuses admission to a begging stranger.”

This concerned the Board of Health because the wanderers, alas, came bearing a plague—typhus and relapsing fever. Infection, carried by lice, traveled as fast as the blight, an astonishing parallel to it. A mere brush with a person could suffice: “one fever-stricken person could pass on infection to a hundred others in the course of the day.” Even the instincts of hospitality had to cede to the disease. But in the filthy and crowded cabins, with no fuel to boil water for bathing, or in the cramped, unsanitary conditions of shipboard, almost everyone was exposed. Probably ten times as many succumbed to disease as died of starvation. The particular heroes were the doctors, who exposed themselves constantly, and the ministering priests; large numbers of each died.

What about the much-resented landowners? Many, for nonpayment of rent, or to avoid paying a sort of head tax on their residents, or just to clear their lands, called in the troops to evict the peasants, or paid them the minimum to take ship for Liverpool or even America. Desperate for food, 300,000 poured into Liverpool between January and June 1847. But a few landowners risked bankruptcy by feeding their tenants, keeping them at work, and paying the poor rates (made heavier by the landed neighbors who had thrown off their responsibility).

What was the British government doing all this time? (The Irish asked this endlessly.) According to Woodham-Smith, Charles Edward Trevelyan, permanent head of the British treasury, an able man of rigid integrity and persistent hard work, played the major role. He recognized the signs of famine early, but his jaundiced view of the Irish, with their “selfish, perverse and turbulent character,” made him hold out to the end against outdoor relief. Trevelyan argued thus: “If the Irish once find out there are any circumstances in which they can get free government grants, we shall have a system of mendicancy such as the world never saw.”

What did Trevelyan’s attitude, shared by Lord John Russell, the prime minister, mean in practice? That landowners, small farmers, and merchants—the solvent Irish—should themselves, by payment of the escalating poor rates, fund the program of public works, the workhouses, the soup kitchens, and even the fever hospitals. Right to the end of 1847 Sir Charles Wood, chancellor of the Exchequer, enforced the payment of rates, even by carrying off the clothes and tools of the nonpayers. Someone starving in Ballinrole, Mayo, spoke for the whole country: “Would to God the government would send us food instead of soldiers.” No wonder this most desperate county of all is still called Mayo, God Help Us.

## FINALLY, SOME AID

Trevelyan, to put it in a nutshell, had a superstitious reverence for free enterprise. The merchants feared any form of welfare, outdoor relief, as likely to bring down their prices. When depots of food were opened, Trevelyan insisted that it be sold at market price plus 5 percent. The food was there, but who could afford it? When the British government voted seed so that farmers could plant, to the value of 50,000 pounds sterling, merchants complained that the government was interfering, and Trevelyan stopped the program. Happily, the Society of Friends stepped in to take up the initiative, which proved very helpful.

The Quakers, both in England and America, true to their name, were outstanding friends to the Irish. The most munificent, though, were the financiers and merchants, headed by Baron Rothschild, composing the British Association for the Relief of the Extreme Distress of Ireland and Scotland. They met daily in London, gathering large sums for food, clothing, and fuel. The United States too rallied with its usual “generosity and sympathy for nations in distress.” Public meetings and donation parties took place nationwide, especially to gather goods in kind, since the British government offered to pay shipping costs. The American Irish sent the most. “Family feeling,” says Woodham-Smith, “is stronger in Ireland than anywhere else in Europe,



and sending money home was already a characteristic of the Irish emigrant."

But when the feverish, emaciated paupers swarmed into Boston, New York, and the Great Lakes states (via Canada, where the disease control was nil and the death toll pitiable), the welcome was grudging at best. What a shock it must have been for these Irish, says the author, to have exchanged the beautiful, poetic countryside for city slums. They jammed together in cellar rooms. They were victimized by their own—bondsmen, boarding-house despots, groggery keepers, criminal "runners," luggage thieves, passage brokers. "Old, white-haired women, mothers with children, emaciated men, nearly all Irish, were so frequently to be seen begging that the New York *Tribune* demanded, 'Cannot this be stopped?'"

In the cities they stayed, for "the Irish are such social people, with immense relish of the company of their kind. The bond of bearing one common wrong united them." The coin, alas, had a reverse side. "The Irish drowned their despair in spirits, . . . and the national weaknesses of drinking and fighting flourished." On the positive side, however, "very many Irish immigrant girls contrived to preserve the gaiety and chastity which have always characterized Irishwomen," and thus many a Bridget found welcome in an American home (in my own home, in the 1930s, her name was Marga-

ret). And appalling as the death rate was—as many as two-thirds of the children under five—the Irish-American birth rate far exceeded both that in Ireland and that in the New World.

In all honesty, it is often difficult to enter into the past and truly feel for refugees from "a peasantry among the most destitute in Europe," but *The Great Hunger* brings us very close. Cecil Woodham-Smith supplies the atmosphere vividly. She leaves us with an assessment of the immigrants' sufferings that may lean toward the rhetorical, given what we know of the early Chinese in California and the involuntary emigrants from Africa, but it does indeed anchor our tolerance and esteem for the Irish. As she writes, "The Irish were the most unfortunate emigrants and the poorest. They took longest to be accepted, longest to become genuinely assimilated. They waited longest before the opportunities the United States offers were freely available to them."



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## Weight Cycling Potentially Harmful

**M**edical studies have found that approximately 50 percent of American women and 25 percent of American men are dieting at any given time. They are responding to the reality that "being overweight has reached epidemic proportions in the United States and Canada," according to Laval University researcher Claude Bouchard, Ph.D., writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Many people go on and off diets repeatedly, gaining pounds often or in large amounts. These clinical findings have raised the question of whether dieters' cycles of weight loss followed by weight gain increase their chances of developing diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension), and high blood fat (hyperlipidemia). Considered to be at highest risk are persons aged 30 to 45, since these are the most avid dieters.

Body weight normally increases with age in nearly everyone. The weight gained with age is principally related to body fat, and as Bouchard notes, "the increase in weight occurs along with a reduction in skeletal-muscle and bone mass." In persons of both sexes who are of normal weight, as well as in the obese, there is also an age-related increase in upper-body adiposity and in internal abdominal fat. These changes in fat deposition with age may be totally independent of the fluctuations in body weight resulting from dieting, exercising, smoking, or the use of weight-reducing pills.

Dr. George Blackburn, a diet expert at New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston, says "Let's not do any radical dieting until we sort this out, because we might be worse off than if we did nothing at all." He advises that people should be especially careful about trying to lose more than 25 pounds, or 10 percent of their body weight. Dr. Kelly Brownell's Yale University research team reported recently in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that in their study the risk of heart disease and death jumped between 25 and 100 percent among people with the most pronounced weight shifts, as compared with those who kept a stable weight even if they were obese. Men were found to be at greater risk through weight cycling (the "yo-yo effect") than women.

Brownell comments that "genetic factors play a large hand in weight, as they do in height, hair color and shoe size. Americans are able to accept great variations in these, but not in weight. Yet when people fight against themselves to mold their own body, they leave inherent victims in their wake." He laments the expanding market for "aggressive" quick-weight-loss products sold in pharmacies and supermarkets and for similar products and services promoted by fasting centers. Dieting is responsible for an estimated \$30 billion annually in sales of liquid-protein diets, weight-loss classes, and health-club fees.



# From Twelve-Step Program to Formation

Anne Graham

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**W**riting this article has turned out to be part of my personal spiritual journey. The fact that I have attempted it four times, each time because I have moved to another self-realization and the impetus to put words to it, indicates to me that there is importance in exploring this topic further. I have also found that others carry either similar or parallel energies around these thoughts and feelings, and that encourages me to search for a broader audience. I hope the reader finds these reflections as helpful as I did in terms of relationship both with self and with people who find the twelve-step program of spirituality at the beginning and core of the conversion that brings them to religious community.

Without a doubt, the vast desert of contemporary meaninglessness has contributed to the new flowering of spirituality that we call the twelve steps. Participants in this relatively recent articulation of personal growth and transformation have found that the twelve steps are beyond and beneath beliefs and doctrines, rules and regulations, touching the very essence of life. They recognize in this spiritual approach a call that underpins specific structures of religion.

Participants in twelve-step programs who apply for entrance into religious life are frequently people who have come to change and transformation through an experience of deep human need and weakness and the power of life/Life within them. Observers experience the intense energy that grows

up among participants in twelve-step programs. There is a language such people know and understand among themselves and seem eager to share with others as well. The total human person, body and psyche and spirit, is addressed from a theory and schema developed out of real-life experience.

Although I configure the spiritual journey in different terms, I recognize in this approach my own learnings about people, my own heritage of spirituality, my professional training put into the vocabulary of the twelve steps. Dynamics I may have named with other words I now hear spoken of in terms such as addiction, dysfunction, and codependence. These are not new experiences I hear about; they are new ways to name what has always been the human condition and human interrelationship, however one describes it.

## REACTION IS COMPLEX

Ambivalence follows. On the one hand I respect and honor and desire to underline what I know others have found to be vital for approaching life/Life. Such has always been my intent, even my style, as a spiritual companion. On the other hand, especially as I work in formation, I desire to open such people to the spiritual tradition of my own community's charism, indicating how and where what they are saying in twelve-step terms has been said yet another way by our religious founder in our rule.



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## **A testimony to the vitality of twelve-step program participants is the energized response of nonparticipants who interact with them**

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Something in me trusts the authenticity of the twelve-step approach, which I believe can bear such a translation. Something in me has enthusiasm for my own charism and sees the spiritual path it places before people to be thoroughly consonant with the best of human development. Something in me views the constellation of religious charisms as a myriad of articulations of the common human experience, and I become energized not only about drawing parallels between my professional learnings concerning human development and spiritual conversion but also about linking the twelve-step approach to my community's charism.

Something prevents me from spontaneously doing so with twelve-step applicants. Where does this reluctance come from? Is it that I experience candidates who began their conversion through the twelve-step program as holding onto it tightly, fearful of losing something so valuable from their personal history? It would seem that for anyone moving from a spirituality so life-giving to one as yet unexperienced, some grief, fear, and resistance might be expected. The reluctance I am aware of as a formation director is greater with twelve-step applicants than with those from other spiritual backgrounds, and I wonder whether it comes from within me or from the other, or perhaps from society. What make the twelve steps an experience apart? Why do I feel I have no right to question it or compare it with other paths of conversion?

### **IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AROUND**

I need to follow a person's energy and understand—truly stand beneath—any experience of ret-

icence to move from intense involvement in twelve-step groups to primary involvement in religious community. What does that primary choice for the community mean in the concrete? At what point do I conclude that it may not be timely for a twelve-step applicant to incorporate into my religious community?

Perhaps a previous question needs to be answered regarding length of time in recovery before admission. Attendance at how many twelve-step group meetings seems a reasonable rhythm as one incorporates? What level of ability to draw parallels between the twelve steps as a spiritual path and the path of spirituality in the religious community is necessary before a candidate moves naturally and with appropriate ease to religious life? What constitutes this readiness for twelve-step applicants to join, to move in with, to opt to create community with, members of the religious group?

Back in the sixties, when I was involved in training using communication games, I participated in an experience—an exercise about breaking into a circle—that came back to me as I raised these questions. The feeling that came over me as I began to wonder about what had brought back this memory was one of being held outside, of not knowing, of being unable to participate in the life of the group held together by the strength and energy of the members' locked arms.

Surely, this image speaks about me and my personal history and issues. However—or, maybe, in addition—I have met with corollaries to my own response, and to other different but significantly energetic responses as well, whenever I have described my attempts to prepare these reflections to other formation persons, religious community members, and spiritual directors.

### **SELF-EXAMINATION NEEDED**

A testimony to the vitality of twelve-step program participants is the energized response of nonparticipants who interact with them. I am more convinced than ever, as a result of beginning to let others in on my own reflections and ponderings, that formation directors need, first of all, to engage in discussions among themselves. Such discussions should be based on the directors' own gut reactions to both the twelve-step program and candidates coming to community from it.

Formation personnel who feel obliged to handle such applicants with kid gloves—who assume that anything to do with twelve-step groups or the candidate's involvement in them is out of bounds for their comments or evaluations—would, I think, benefit first of all from admitting to themselves their tendency to have such responses and then looking at them with others in similar roles. Formation personnel who think they are not allowed to contribute their wisdom and insight to twelve-



step candidates moving toward incorporation into religious community need to talk about and explore this attitude with others involved in the same ministry. Formation personnel who feel they must keep their hands off anything in the candidate's life related to participation in twelve-step groups need to explore together that assumption and the feelings that give birth to it.

Formation personnel need to look honestly at the questions they have about how the twelve steps find application in religious charism. They need to wonder together about a number of things: Are there special issues surrounding initiation for twelve-step applicants as they take on the spirituality of the religious institute? Is it rigid and narrow to encourage this movement to happen? Is it being too careful even to ask these questions and thereby to look at twelve-step candidates as different, as perhaps too fragile to be treated as others would be?

## FEELING EXCLUDED AND INTRUSIVE

As I express these questions I return once more to my "breaking in" image and my own response, as well as the reactions I encounter when I mention these questions to other formation personnel. Is there something, whether intentional or unconscious, about a number of twelve-step participants together that suggests a closed club, a uniqueness of experience of need, compulsion, pain, despair, return to life? If there is such a quality, on what is it based—on the common problem of chemical addiction? (Yet there are other, non-chemically addicted people in twelve-step programs—for example, those in Alanon, Overeaters Anonymous, and Adult Children of Alcoholics.)

The last question brings up another important concern for the formation director: how those who acknowledge physical dependency have ascertained the nature of their situation. In my own experience, some persons active in Alcoholic's Anonymous have not been to death's door with their addiction; rather, in consultation with an addiction counselor, they have answered positively a set of questions revolving around the importance of the chemical in their lives. Is the response to persons who have decided that they fit in the category of the chemically addicted, but have not been proven to be physically addicted, the same as for those who will surely die if they use a given chemical? And unless people are physically addicted, how does the approach to dealing with compulsion differ from that of anyone facing dynamics around control through excess and denial?

To say this another way: "If I drink I will die" is a terrifying statement—not only to the chemically dependent applicant to religious life but also to the formation director. How does the director ascer-

tain whether for this applicant the statement is literally true, chemically proven? Does the director assume that a candidate's assessment of his or her symptoms is accurate, or is there room to explore and perhaps question how this conclusion was reached by the candidate?

What does a director do if and when he or she finds statements of boundaries, calls for exceptions, requests for exemptions, or reasons for behaviors inserted at times and in situations that suggest manipulation on the candidate's part? Perhaps this last question might be better put another way: How does the director move beyond fear of upsetting a candidate's possibly inaccurate, or possibly accurate and incomplete, appraisal of what he or she needs in terms of personal response and rhythm of life?

## NO PERFECT FAMILIES

Questions of a different nature come up when dealing with twelve-step applicants who are adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs). To some extent, are not all families dysfunctional, since all people come from settings in which the compulsions of parents and children affect one another and limit freedom? Are we not all afflicted with our own and others' compulsions? Have not all adults established systems of survival in response? Are not all families made up of members who are fallible human beings? Of course, there are degrees of dysfunction related to greater or lesser defensive dynamics both within and outside a person.

Might it be helpful for ACOA group members to realize they share a common human situation? Might it enhance the growth of ACOA applicants to religious life if they were to remind themselves that everyone else in one's environment has secrets that seem too horrible to reveal, wounds that hurt deeply and limit functioning? Would more emphasis in formation programs on contemplative life as essential to conversion be helpful in this regard? I am speaking here of contemplation viewed as a growing ability to look at interior and exterior reality straightforwardly, acknowledging more and more of what is so.

The spiritualities of religious charisms worthy of the name, as well as descriptions of human development, variously articulate the path toward wholeness. Might an inability to understand this be a sign that a candidate still lacks the breadth of view needed to see his or her struggles reflected in those of others? Might such a candidate, immersed in very real and unique pain, be manifesting the need for a longer period spent attending to basic self-acceptance?

How do all of these questions translate to people who, while long in religious life, are newly come to a sense of their need for conversion through a twelve-step program? This question is an impor-



tant one. As formation directors, however, we can put it aside. Others, of course, cannot do so; it needs attention in religious life today.

## SOURCES OF INTIMIDATION

Like Pandora, I have trepidation about opening this box. The questions that pour out of it are not ones I have heard stated by others. When I articulate them, however—and they are not exhaustive—I find that other formation personnel and spiritual directors ask them too, but not out loud. And I wonder, What is that about? What makes us reluctant even to express questions, concerns, and feelings around twelve-step programs and applicants to religious life from them?

One cause of my own reticence to do so is fear I will appear to be insensitive and unsympathetic. Perhaps, also, I am ignorant and simplistic; twelve-step participants might feel that the addictive situation is not one in which I have adequate training and background. Then I find myself responding that human nature itself cannot have changed, that life cannot have become basically different, in the years since twelve-step spirituality was formulated. I wonder whom I see myself responding to in this imaginary exchange and whether and when I am being defensive. I know there is frustration and anger in all this, and I need to understand more about that. Woven in and out of it all is a concern about treating twelve-step applicants with too much care, allowing their addiction to pull me into protecting them, or into codependence, to use the vocabulary of the system from which they come.

## NEED FOR COURAGE

Such are some of my feelings, my questions, my concerns around dealing with twelve-step applicants. I have come to learn in this process that others share these or similar ones. Twelve-step spirituality can cause problems in formation programs, just as it can in families. Finally, I wonder whether formation personnel are ever going to have the courage to admit to themselves and others how they feel and then talk about the issues of addiction and the twelve-step response encountered in initial formation.

Such discussion needs to occur without apology to representatives of twelve-step programs and, at least initially, without their presence. Anything that would inhibit open and spontaneous brainstorming ought to be avoided. Until that happens in groups of formation personnel, there will continue to be a not-so-small, not-so-comfortable, untouchable reality in the middle of our formation programs. This reality needs addressing. Formation personnel cannot continue to treat twelve-step spirituality and its followers as unapproachably sacred, nor can they continue to view themselves as iconoclasts. No one is served by either approach—neither the individuals involved nor the religious community.

Twelve-step participants may respond that the answers to all these questions are to be found in their programs. Is this equivalent to saying that one needs to relate to such issues through the twelve-step system, or is it merely an invitation to communication? With these questions we open up still another area of wondering. Pandora's box is not empty yet.

## Older Workers Are Good Investment

**A** recent major study of older workers has found that in many ways they do a better job than their younger counterparts. The study, commissioned by the Commonwealth Fund, a nonprofit philanthropic organization, discovered that older workers (1) are flexible in accepting work assignments, (2) master new technologies as quickly as younger people, (3) are often better salespeople, (4) don't switch jobs as frequently as younger people, and (5) are more likely to show up when scheduled to work.

Commonwealth Fund Senior Vice-President Thomas W. Maloney, upon releasing the study, stated that "this study for the first time provides numerical results from real companies that have hired older workers. The bottom line speaks for itself: The case studies prove that hiring older people makes good business sense."

The Commonwealth Fund commissioned a Washington, D.C., consulting firm to compare older and younger workers at Days Inns of America, Inc., The

Travelers Corporation, and B&Q, the largest do-it-yourself home-improvement firm in Great Britain. Among the significant findings at Days Inns was that it takes younger and older workers the same amount of time to be trained on sophisticated computer equipment. At the British retail chain B&Q, an entire store was staffed with workers aged 50 and older to determine the seniors' capabilities. When compared with the average of five other B&Q stores, it was found that this store was 18 percent more profitable, employee turnover was six times lower, there was less absenteeism, and the store's inventory suffered less damage and theft.

Maloney observed, in the American Association of Retired Persons *Bulletin*, that "in no instance were these companies motivated by compassion or social justice. They were motivated by profitability and the availability of skilled workers."



# The Ministry of Authority

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

**T**here are very few, if any, dimensions of religious life unaffected by the transitions of the past quarter century. Ministries have been evaluated, redesigned, and sometimes replaced as emerging apostolic needs have been given priority over the maintenance and preservation of traditional works. Individual and communal forms of prayer have evolved in response to the rich and diverse spiritual resources available. Community life has been, and continues to be, redefined according to the changing demographics of religious congregations. The vows and other bonds of consecration have been rearticulated as forms of witness, which the church and the culture will always need. Government structures have been reshaped to correspond with these transitions in ministry, prayer, community, and the vows. All this has transpired with the hope of continuing and enhancing the presence and activity of apostolic religious congregations.

What is the experience of those in the ministry of authority in the midst of all this? Do they feel at the forefront or in the muddling middle or at the ragged rear? The answer, I suspect, includes all three, and not only collectively among those in authority; individually, they have known the full triumvirate of experiences.

## GOD CALLS LEADERS

Before examining some specific experiences within the ministry of authority, permit me to present a brief biblical digression. Through the scriptures, God called and cajoled and sometimes coerced a variety of individuals into positions of leadership and responsibility. Consider the experiences of the following characters.

As we eavesdrop on Moses' encounter with Yahweh, we may detect the able apologist at work. Moses' reaction to God's call includes several objections to the possibility of accepting the mission. His excuses cover every angle, from his lack of political and social standing before the pharaoh and the people, to the incredulity he will arouse, to his speech impediment. God insists and Moses complies. His compliance pays off. After his death it is proclaimed, "There has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 34:10-11).

Upon becoming king in less-than-secure times, Solomon prays for "wisdom to govern your people, discernment between good and evil. For who can govern this great people of yours?" (I Kings 3:9).

Jonah, one of the most intriguing characters in all of scripture, doesn't believe that God's plan for Nineveh will really work, so he runs away. God catches up with him. Jonah does what he is asked. It works. Jonah is disgusted. God must think "I can't win."

If Yahweh feels that he can't win with Jonah, even though he does, Jeremiah surely must feel that he can't win with Yahweh, or at least that Yahweh is out to get him. Jeremiah, whose prophetic message will not win him any popularity contests, is beside himself when he realizes what his mission has entailed. "Lord, you have seduced me, and I have let myself be seduced . . . If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' then within me there is something like a burning fire . . . I cannot hold it in" (20:7,9). Jeremiah is faithful and so becomes familiar with the living accommodations provided by cisterns.



Jesus chooses Peter as the leader of the early church—Peter, “the rock.” This rock would publicly and professedly betray Jesus yet eventually would embrace a martyr’s death for the sake of his Master.

Paul zips along preaching, forming and reforming local churches, and writing, all with a divine arrogance that could have come only from his conviction that he had been “called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). God would exact nothing less than Paul’s life in the service of that gospel.

This digression is intended only as a starter for reflection. We could add stories from the lives of other leaders throughout church history, including the founders and other notables in the history and heritage of our congregations. It would be revealing to hear not just their stories but also their personal experiences of, and perspectives on, the ministry of authority. Whatever they would say, we would surely hear that they too knew the hesitation of Moses, Solomon’s need for divine support, the resistance and running of Jonah, Jeremiah’s demanding dilemma, the self-serving and self-giving Peter, and Paul’s bold and creative confidence. All this is but the blessing and the burden of the ministry.

Never has the ministry of authority been easy; the transition and turbulence in religious life during the past twenty-five years have made it anything but easier. The present reflections will focus on some experiences of those in authority, particularly experiences that arise in response to the expectations of community members. The purpose is not to analyze but to support and encourage. These reflections stem from listening to and working with men and women religious on different levels of authority. They are also influenced, however, by my own experience in local and provincial administrations. Serving on these two levels simultaneously is not always the happiest experience, but it is usually an interesting and educational one. Its interest lies in navigating the Scylla of conflicting interests and the Charybdis of distorting priorities, sometimes sailing those waters with weariness. Its education lies in learning to pray, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” or “Take this cup away from me,” or “How much longer, O Lord?”

## EXPECTED EMPLOYMENTS

Among the transition that have affected the ministry of authority are those related to the restructuring of governmental procedures and the practices of obedience. Greater emphasis than in previous eras is now placed on consultation, discernment, personal initiative, and individual responsibility. Those procedures and practices surely have enabled religious to be efficient and effective in their ministries, prayer, community life, and

personal and professional development. There is a shadow side here, however. At times, after the consulting and discerning and initiating and responding, those in authority discover some unclaimed jobs, or employments, that community members expect them to handle. Before they even realize it, ministers of authority find themselves caught in, and feel trapped by, these expected employments.

Those in authority feel like the hired help when they are expected to do what others simply do not want to do. Interestingly enough, the hired-help expectation usually includes the execution of tasks that everyone assumes “somebody” will do regularly. The tasks are simple, everyday things: answering the phone or door, fueling and maintaining cars, entertaining guests, sorting mail, housekeeping—any of the little things that need to be done. The point is not that community members never do these things; rather, it is that the prevalent attitude is sometimes to assume that the superior is more responsible than others for the completion of such tasks. And that assumption stands firm even if the one in authority is not available or aware or skilled to meet the expectation within the attitude. I once heard a religious note, “The superior never answered that phone yesterday. I know—I sat here and heard it ring twenty times; no one answered it.” Guess the hired help had the day off.

Those in authority feel like transmitters when they are expected to relay (and referee, if necessary) information between community members who have adopted and adapted to a pattern of low or no communication with one another. The transmitter expectation focuses on the desires and needs that one member or segment of the community wants articulated to another. Whether or not ministers of authority share the agenda at hand, they are expected to transmit it. Admittedly, the ideal would be for the interested parties to establish a direct line of communication through confrontation or negotiation. But in some instances, to say that this ideal is easier said than done would be a fathomless understatement. Depending on the patterns and personalities involved, establishing such a line could range from a minor consultation to a major conflagration. Transmitters are sometimes, and unfortunately, necessary for the sake of peace, not to mention civility. “When is the superior ever going to tell that person to stop bothering me so much?” Maybe the transmitter was being tuned to the other channel.

Those in authority feel like encyclopedias when they are expected to know, process, update, and distribute all information pertinent to the life, livelihood, and ministry of each community member. The encyclopedia expectation involves containing and maintaining personal and professional facts—in brief, serving as the community’s user-friendly database. This is no mean expectation. Its subassumptions include accuracy in what is



known, acceptability of how it is processed, accountability for the ways it is updated, and accessibility to the channels through which it is distributed. The expectation and its subassumptions continue to function whether or not ministers of authority have been regularly and sufficiently apprised of additions to or deletions from the core of information at hand. The person in authority is assumed to have every iota of material necessary for consistently wise and prudent (that is to say, agreeable) decisions. "How could the superior not know I haven't been feeling well? I went to see the doctor just this morning!" Possibly that edition of the encyclopedia has gone out of print.

Those in authority feel like maintenance managers when they are expected to ensure that life goes along smoothly and undisturbed without infringing on preferences or upsetting patterns. The maintenance-manager expectation takes in everything not already covered by the preceding employments—everything from food to furniture, from hygiene to holiness, from plumbing to prayer. The unspoken but well-defined assumption here is that no expectation, individual or communal, will remain unfulfilled. Of course, it is not really worth taking the time and energy to scrutinize "mere technicalities" such as whether or not a particular expectation is realistic or feasible or even possible. Whatever is broken will be fixed, whatever is empty will be filled, and whatever is wanted will be financed. All this fixing and filling and financing can happen whenever—but expeditiously, of course. "The superior will take care of it, don't worry about it; it's part of the job anyway." Maybe the maintenance manager will consider replacements rather than repairs in the future.

Within any one of these expected employments there can appear, sometimes subtly and sometimes not, a role that those in authority are graciously assigned: dart board. When expectations are not met according to standards that may or may not have been articulated, someone must be at fault. Someone has to be the object of anger and frustration. Ministers of authority serve as convenient dart boards for anything being projected onto everything and everyone, with no self-examination by the person projecting. The dart-board method of ventilating anger and frustration can be put into motion whether or not ministers of authority have anything to do with the actual situation identified as the point that stimulated this response. While those in authority may dispassionately dismiss this role as part of the job, they must be attentive to any ill effects—physical, emotional, or spiritual—of serving as the communal dart board. Deterioration of health can be so subtle as to progress unnoticed until some major disruption in the quality of personal life becomes evident. Ministers of authority may make a variety of assumptions about how they are affected by the ministry; among those, how-

ever, should not be the assumption that pretends to mitigate their own vulnerability.

Being the hired help and transmitter and encyclopedia and maintenance manager is especially tiring, since these are usually concurrent employments. Of more importance and concern, however, is the subtle cynicism they can generate within ministers of authority. Not an overtly bleak attitude toward life, this cynicism is a residual weariness from dealing with the shadow side of community. It finds expression in the intuition or suspicion that community members comfortably exonerate themselves from responsible initiative. Sometimes there is simply no contradictory evidence. Contributing to this weariness is the fact that the ministry of authority subsists on a low-affirmation diet. Those in authority do not need many fingers to count the calls and correspondence they receive confirming the value of their service. And since the service is not always distinguished from the servant, that lack of affirmation can have implications for the self-esteem of those in authority. Fortunately, there is more to this ministry than the expected employments.

## PERCEIVED PRIVILEGES

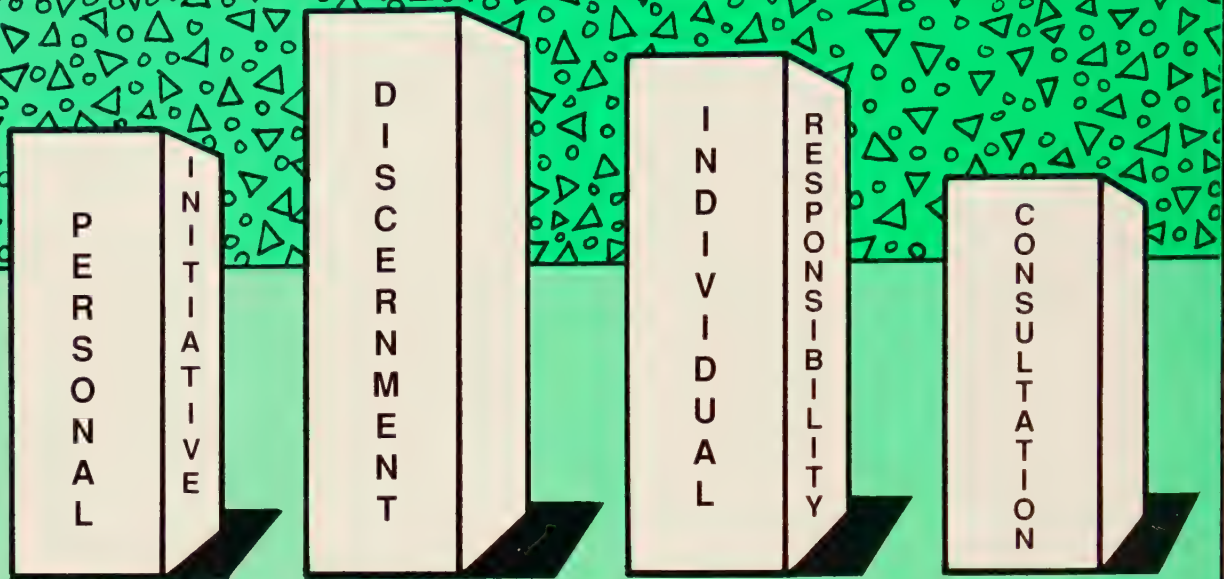
Before I had any firsthand experience in the ministry of authority, I suppose I did imagine that work was involved, although it would be resplendent with privileges. That image had almost nothing to do with those in authority at the time and almost everything to do with my perception of what actually occupied their time when they were not giving out permission. As one confrere explained, "Being provincial or superior is work, but he gets to travel a lot, and his room is a suite with a private bath!" If this sums up the ministry of authority, then why aren't religious lining up to get in? There must be more to it; there must be some elements that counterbalance the expected employments.

There are privileges associated with the ministry of authority, even though they may be perceived quite differently outside the ministry than they are inside. They have less to do with the trappings of office than with the opportunities for truth. The truth of each community member becomes the privileged arena in which ministers of authority share. The richness of such opportunities does indeed offer a refreshing counterpoint to the expected employments in which those in authority will inevitably be engaged.

As a counterpoint to the hired-help expectation, those in authority are privileged to see the generosity and selflessness of community members who quietly and effectively direct their efforts toward maintaining the priority of the common good. Those efforts need not, and often do not, entail heroic undertakings, though they do address ap-



## Increasingly Emphasized in Religious Life



propriately and accurately what needs to be accomplished at the moment. More than anything else, those efforts are a celebration of humility, a profound awareness that serving others in community is a fundamental part of the commitment to religious life. Furthermore, such service is a gospel imperative. This humility, though often unpublicized until the person's funeral eulogy, stands as firm evidence of humanity's ability to break the boundaries of insular individualism, to reach beyond itself and do the good that must be done.

As a counterpoint to the transmitter expectation, those in authority are privileged to see the crosses, the pains and struggles, of community members. These crosses may not have the immediate evidence of chronic physical, emotional, or mental disabilities. Still, they are penetrating: uncertainty in one's vocation and even faith after many years in religious life, sexual feelings and thoughts that one believed to be in the past, fear of what the future will bring for oneself and for community, loneliness, fear of aging and of growing limitations, departures or deaths of friends—the list could go on. More than anything else, such crosses are a celebration of sacrifice, an understanding that following the crucified Jesus is the only way to the risen Jesus. This, too, is a gospel imperative. This sacrifice is no spiritualized masochism. It is a confirmation of humanity's ability to accept the graced invitation to live as Jesus lived, to die as Jesus died, and so to rise as he rose.

As a counterpoint to the encyclopedia expectation, those in authority are privileged to see the dawning of insights within and the taking of risks by community members. Those insights and risks may not be dramatic; nevertheless, they can stimulate individuals to explore avenues of ministry, of community, and of everyday life that they thought would never match their capabilities and thus would remain ever beyond their reach and realization. More than anything else, the acceptance of those insights and risks is a celebration of integrity, an engaging and energetic approach to one's own principles and convictions so growth and development will be possible and probable. To embrace life to the fullest is truly a gospel imperative. This integrity proclaims humanity's ability to cultivate the Kingdom that Jesus promised, for all people and for each person.

As a counterpoint to the maintenance-manager expectation, those in authority are privileged to see the creativity and initiative of community members as they respond to, participate in, and support the everyday life of the community. Very often, that creativity and initiative are used simply to devise new ways of doing the same old things so that those experiences are enhanced for the community. More than anything else, that creativity and initiative are a celebration of a fidelity, a constancy in commitment, that does not mitigate the standards embraced through profession to religious life. To live with such purity and purpose is at the heart of



the gospel imperative. This fidelity acclaims humanity's ability to stand firmly in the fertile soil of promises made to God, knowing they are fulfilled only by trusting God's everlasting promises.

These counterpoints present a more precise picture of the privileges associated with the ministry of authority than may be perceived outside the ministry. Whatever visible appointments accompany the office of authority, the true privileges are found in its access to the sacred. Entering the life of another human being and seeing the operations of grace there is to enter the life of God and to see the Lord's presence and activity. That entrance and that sight provide ministers of authority with a taste of the sin and grace, the darkness and light, within human nature. That entrance and that sight provide ministers of authority with evidence of the crucified and risen Lord ever present and active within the community and, through it, among the people.

These counterpoints become a source of hope for those in authority; they nourish the conviction that the human spirit can and will triumph in cooperation with grace. This hope stands in sharp contrast to the cynicism that can be born of the expected employments. More than a simple optimism, this hope is an assurance that humility, sacrifice, integrity, and fidelity are possible. This assurance may not make the expected employments palatable, but it can reveal the progress possible despite them. Even with all this, these counterpoints do not excuse those in authority from attending to their own needs to replenish the energy drained and to restore the perspective distorted by the intensity of their ministry.

## **SALVAGED SANITY**

Those in authority would not win many awards for outstanding achievement in taking care of themselves. Patterns of overeating, undersleeping, and never playing develop as timetables become frenetic and nerves become frayed. Overtaxed timetables and nerves are an effective recipe for distorting perspectives. Even the perceived privileges in which ministers of authority share do not always offset the continuity of content that the expected employments generously provide. It becomes axiomatic that the effects of the ministry are inversely proportional to ministers' awareness of the presence and extent of those effects. Although limited terms of office guarantee life and liberty after the ministry of authority, some practices can be adopted during those terms to salvage sanity.

To balance the work associated with the hired-help expectation, ministers of authority should establish a pattern of getting away from the ministry environment on a regular basis. This is not a cleverly disguised way of justifying escape. Those in authority would penetrate such a disguise with

the generous supplies of guilt occasionally (or often) felt when claiming some personal time for play or rest or simply being apart from others. Getting away from the ministry environment has less to do with escape than with maintaining physical and psychological well-being. Without compromising the patience and humility necessary for authority, those in this ministry may think of themselves as invincible. They can insist that travel and tension, which are part of their lives, will not have any long-range effects. The fallacy of that insistence can go too long undiscovered, and the inverse-proportion axiom becomes quickly operative. Getting away from the ministry environment, like so many other commitments for those in authority, needs to be scheduled and held to. Doesn't the hired help deserve a break now and then?

To balance the work associated with the transmitter expectation, ministers of authority should maintain supportive friendships apart from their constituencies. This is not to say that such friendships will not develop and be maintained within those constituencies. It is, rather, an acknowledgment that friendships can shift unexpectedly and possibly unhappily as one friend moves into the ministry of authority and another does not. Maintaining friendships apart from those with whom ministers of authority live and work is less a commentary on community members than an expression of ministers' need to maintain emotional and affective well-being. Without compromising the listening and sensitivity necessary for authority, those in this ministry may think of themselves as dispassionate. They can claim that drama and drudgery, which consume time and energy, exact no lasting toll. The mistake here is that just as with our highway system, the toll is not paid until the course is completed. Maintaining supportive friendships requires a vulnerability and a passion that become sources of energy for effective ministry. Can't the transmitter be recharged?

To balance the work associated with the encyclopedia expectation, ministers of authority should nurture interests and activities that have nothing to do with their ministry. This is neither avoidance nor pretense. The responsibility of ministers of authority to distribute information and provide perspective haunts them wherever a telephone or fax or telegraph or modem can reach them. Nurturing outside interests and activities has little to do with efficiency of distribution and everything to do with maintaining intellectual and mental well-being. Without compromising the wisdom and counsel necessary for authority, those in this ministry may think of themselves as altruistic. They can assume that the information and perspective they share do not limit their horizons. Too easily forgotten is the investment of personal resources involved in gathering, processing, evaluating, and communicating that information and perspective.



Nurturing interests and activities unrelated to the ministry of authority is a discipline that mitigates the potential for ministerial and personal insularity. Shouldn't the encyclopedia keep its binding flexible through the addition of new and diverse entries?

To balance the work associated with the maintenance-manager expectation, ministers of authority should remain faithful to spiritual direction/companionship. By this fidelity, those in authority affirm and embrace their dependence on the Lord and their need for the power and stamina that only grace can provide. All this but confirms the need to maintain spiritual well-being. That is the cornerstone for whatever ministers of authority are called on to do. Without compromising the contemplation and calm necessary for authority, those in this ministry may think of themselves as self-contained. They know that the rhyme and reason for their decisions are initially and ultimately their responsibility. The caution here is to recognize that the word they speak is not completely their own. Thus, their accountability is probed by more than the community members; God will look into their hearts. Remaining faithful to spiritual direction/companionship is a reminder that the ministry of authority is truly the Lord's work. Those in authority must have hearts that always provide working space for the Lord. Isn't it wise for the maintenance manager to carry a box that always has room for additional tools?

Strategies for salvaging sanity will vary among those in the ministry of authority. The underlying point of those presented here emphasizes the importance of developing such strategies. In addition to providing balance to the expected employments and the dart-board role that accompanies them, strategies also provide ministers of authority with fresh air away from their function as fire fighters. In this function, which is taken up within any of the expected employments, the immediacy of response is the priority. That response does not preclude the need to sift through the ashes of a community situation, looking for sparks that may yet erupt, stomping here and there. Those in authority need to make time for breathing deeply the pure air provided by strategies for salvaging sanity.

Strategies are often adopted with conviction at the beginning of terms of office, only to be abandoned once the full range of responsibilities rises into clarity. Reasons for that abandonment are myriad but regrettable, since a strategic pattern, once discontinued, becomes increasingly difficult to reinstate. New drains on time and energy have taken its place. Among the most insidious reasons is the simple dismissal of the need to salvage sanity. As those in authority grow in personal conviction, confidence, and competence within their ministry, the probable need for auxiliary supports depreciates. That depreciation, however,

does not account for the physical, psychological, emotional, affective, intellectual, mental, and spiritual expenditures and even debilitations possible within the ministry of authority. Better to invest in strategies for salvaging sanity than in strategies for nurturing it after neglect.

## ACCEPTANCE OF ELECTION

Those already in the ministry of authority may be tempted to respond with a resounding no when confronted with this question: Do you accept election? But my intention here has been to encourage rather than to discourage, for the sake of personal balance and ministerial perspective. The question emerges as to whether the constitutional norms for installation involve election or appointment. The scriptural personalities noted in the digression at the beginning of these reflections had to confront the question, as have countless men and women throughout salvation history, even unto today. The question emerges simply because God does not trample the irrevocable gift of free will.

Do you accept election? Or, asked from an etymological view, Do you take this up, having been chosen out of the others? This rendition of the question touches the very heart of the ministry of authority. It is a choice made by the Lord and confirmed in the consensual power of the community. It involves both cross and resurrection, the fullness of the paschal mystery, through its employments and its privileges. To lead others in religious life regardless of their expectations and perceptions, to initiate and affirm forward movement, to forge the future: these are the tasks and responsibilities, and the distinctions, of those in authority.

No doubt, like leaders in the scriptures and in the church throughout the ages, those in the ministry of authority in religious life will continue to confront feelings of insufficiency, uncertainty, and inadequacy as they take up and carry on their responsibilities. No magic potion exists to change that; the feelings must be borne. Those in authority then must embrace, with all the power and conviction of their faith and integrity, the simple truth of God's promise: "My grace is all you need; power is most fully seen and made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).



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# Acceptance as a Way of Life

William Schock, S.J.

*Lord, give me serenity to accept what cannot be changed,  
courage to change what can be changed, and wisdom to  
know the difference.*

**T**he Prayer of Serenity, quoted above, can be an occasional prayer, or it can become a way of life—a life of greater peace and contentment. If you do not experience more peace in your life, it is not because of what is happening to you. It depends on how you choose to look at things. If you go through the day with blaming, angry, and critical thoughts, you will feel miserable because you are making yourself miserable. If you go through the same day with excusing, forgiving, and loving thoughts, you will feel more at peace. You can't always choose what is happening to you, but you can choose the way you think about what is happening: "Change your thoughts and you will change your world." Most often you can't change *the* world—what is happening to you—but you can change *your* world—the way you think about and react to the world.

## HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY ANGER

It is very healthy to feel angry when you see someone treated unjustly. The anger you experience can give you the energy to do something about the injustice, energy you would not have if you did

not feel angry. This is the kind of anger Jesus experienced. He was angry with the Pharisees, who were unjustly demanding the observance of too many laws. He was angry with the money changers and those who were selling animals and pigeons, because they had turned his Father's house into a market (John 2:14–16).

But if you experience too much anger too often or for too long a time, something is definitely wrong. These are experiences of unhealthy anger, which can have a bad effect on you physically as well as emotionally. One reason you experience too much anger is that you are being annoyed by various things and aren't aware of what is happening. The anger keeps building up unnoticed until you explode over a minor incident—something that couldn't have caused such an explosion. The explosion came from within.

Another common reason for feeling too angry is being angry with someone but failing to deal with that person as you should. So you take your anger out on some innocent victim—a child, a companion, a fellow worker. The innocent victim might even be a door that doesn't open or close properly, or anything else that doesn't work the way it should; you start banging things around, a sure sign of the stored up anger within. It could also happen that you are angry with yourself for some reason, but you misdirect that anger at someone or something else.



If you experience anger too often it is probably because you are judging things and people negatively and critically, because you are not accepting things and people as they are. You may also be expecting too much of others. If children annoy you, for example, is it the children or your unreasonable demands about what they should or should not be doing that disturb you? Is the real disturbance coming from what others are doing, or is it coming from within, from your unreasonable way of thinking about what they are doing?

It is important to understand the difference between an occasion and a cause. For instance, let's say the behavior of children is the occasion for your anger. If the children were not there, you would not feel angry. That's true. But the real cause of your anger is from within, from your critical and angry thoughts about the children. This means that you are responsible for your feelings. We often use expressions like "exams make me nervous" or "he makes me angry." Here, again, we are confusing an occasion with a cause. The cause of your nervousness and anger is not what is happening to you but what you are doing to yourself by the way you are thinking about what is happening. The solution, then, to your unhealthy anger is not to change others but to change yourself by exchanging critical and blaming thoughts for excusing and forgiving thoughts.

It is also unhealthy when anger lasts too long. Ordinarily, a fire will die out if it is left alone. To keep it burning, you have to add fuel. The same thing happens with anger. It is natural to get angry when certain things happen. But if you continue to feel angry about what happened, it is because you are feeding angry thoughts into the fire of your resentment, keeping it alive and burning.

The following three exercises will help you discover where some of your unhealthy anger is coming from. These exercises can be done privately or in groups with sharing and discussion. Simply to read through each exercise without doing it is not very profitable. The exercises need to be worked through.

## **EXERCISE 1. THINGS YOU DON'T LIKE**

**A. Making a List.** Make a list of things you don't like, are unhappy about, are annoyed by, often complain about. These different expressions all mean more or less the same thing. This list would contain impersonal things, such as certain foods, the weather, mosquitoes, noise, late buses, mechanical objects that don't work. (In Exercise 3 you will look at more personal things—things you don't like about other people.)

**B. Changing What Can Be Changed.** Is there anything you can do to change what you don't like? Even if you can't change or avoid those things

completely, there may be something you can do, and usually something is better than nothing. You can ask others not to play the radio so loudly, for example. It might help and it might not, but at least you will have tried. If there is nothing you can do to change what you don't like, you have learned something. Then the only solution is to accept what you can't change.

**C. What to Do About Noise?** Something that you might be bothered by is noise. It is important to understand that it isn't the noise that bothers you. The noise is only the occasion of your being disturbed, not the cause. It is your fighting the noise that disturbs you unnecessarily. And you are fighting and resisting if you complain about the noise and blame the noise makers with judgments like "What's the matter with those people? Don't they have any consideration? Why so loud? Why now?" These questions reflect your unreasonable demands about what those people should or should not be doing. Who are you to decide what others should be doing? There may be times when those in your charge need to be told what to do, but far too often we try to control others too much. And if you tell yourself, "This is too much!" it becomes "too much" for you, and you feel overburdened. The feeling of being overburdened is created by the label you put on the situation. On a rare occasion something might be too much, but often we make mountains out of molehills, as the saying goes.

So what can you do about the noise you can't change? Don't try not to listen; that won't help. In fact, it will make you feel worse, because you will be resisting the noise. The secret is to listen to the noise. That's right—just listen. Give your full attention to the noise without blaming anyone. This is your way of accepting the noise. It is amazing how quickly the disturbance disappears when you stop fighting and just listen; this proves that the disturbance was really coming from within. When you stop fighting, you give your body a chance to adjust to the noise more quickly. It also helps to have kind thoughts about those making the noise.

**D. Learning to Practice Acceptance.** Spend some time with your list of things you don't like. What are the things that can't be changed that you need to accept? Begin with the things you will be able to accept most easily and slowly work up to the harder things. Just by being a little more receptive, a little more open to things being different, and a little less defensive, you will find it easier to accept many things. Acceptance is a decision, not a feeling. You learn to accept something because you choose to. You can choose not to accept what is happening that you can't change, and this will lead to resentment or impatience or some other unhealthy feeling. Or you can choose to surrender. You can choose to accept what is happening, and



# Prescription For Reducing Feelings of Anger



Use your free  
will deliberately



~~To Change  
Others~~

To Change  
Yourself

**How?** Substitute tolerant, compassionate, excusing, and forgiving thoughts (instead of blaming and judgmental thinking).

this will lead to peace. The choice, sometimes a difficult one, is yours to make.

After you have really accepted something you don't like, imagine yourself in a situation in which you used to be bothered by that thing. But now see yourself acting with a little more patience and being a little less annoyed. This imaginative way of acting helps create a new self-image. You always act according to your self-image, the way you see and judge yourself. Until now you have seen yourself acting impatiently in certain situations. Now, in your imagination, you see yourself acting differently, and this will begin to change your image of yourself, which will allow you to do in real life what you see yourself doing in fantasy. But it takes time to change old habits. The important thing is that you have really made your act of acceptance. As you continue living out your new way of acting, you will have to renew your acceptance from time to time.

## EXERCISE 2. THINGS YOU DO BECAUSE YOU "HAVE TO"

**A. Making a List.** Make a list of things you do because you "have to." This does not mean things like breathing and eating and sleeping, things that you do to stay alive and healthy. What are the things you do because you are told to, because it is your duty, or because you have no choice? These could be activities such as correcting exams, doing the bookkeeping, traveling, getting up at a certain

time, doing some unpleasant work, conducting the liturgy in a certain way, asking for permission, or going to confession.

**B. Changing What Can Be Changed.** When you do something because you "have to," there is a feeling of being forced, and this will lead to resentment or anger or frustration. Since you will probably have to do that thing anyway, why not find a way of doing it without resentment and in a way that will bring peace and satisfaction?

Is there anything you can do to avoid or change the unpleasant duty? Of course, you can avoid doing something simply by not doing it. But that doesn't always solve the problem; it often makes matters worse. At times it might be good to ask someone else to do what you are supposed to do or to ask for a change. It takes a lot of honest discernment to decide if we should try to get out of doing what we don't want to do.

**C. Learning to Practice Acceptance.** Undesirable duties might be little things, such as writing a letter or dusting the chapel. But one little resentment added to another sooner or later leads to an angry outburst or fatigue or even sickness. Undesirable duties might be concerned with something more important, such as a new assignment or some other important change. This could be a real crisis in your life. You can't pray and you can't get along with others as long as you are fighting what you are being asked to do. Some people go through weeks



and months of misery because they refuse to surrender. Sometimes the resentment is centered around the way the change was brought about: "But it isn't fair" or "But he should have asked me first" or "But if she hadn't gotten sick, I wouldn't have to do this now. Why me?" and a hundred other thoughts that are excuses for not accepting what you are given to do. You are going to surrender sooner or later, hopefully, if what is happening can't be changed. Why not sooner rather than later? Because surrendering is so hard on one's pride.

Just as it takes time to work through the pain one feels when someone we love dies, it also takes time, painful time, to move from one place to another, from one work to another. Separation and change are often difficult—more difficult for some than for others. The problem might be our attachment to a place or a work. But the sooner we accept what is happening, the sooner we will experience peace and be able to get on with life again.

With important and difficult things, acceptance takes longer. Jesus struggled through his prayer of acceptance in the Garden of Gethsemane. He tried to bring about a change when he asked the Father to take the cup of suffering from him. But when he realized that this wouldn't happen, he surrendered and accepted what the Father was asking (Matt. 26:39–44). As a result of his surrender, Jesus found the strength to go through the Passion with such peace.

**D. Doing Something Because You Want To.** You can choose to continue doing what you have to do because you "have to," or you can choose to do the same thing because you want to. It may be a difficult choice, but it is the only route to peace. Try to find reasons for really wanting to do that thing, reasons that are really meaningful for you. Find as many reasons as you can—natural ones as well as supernatural ones, reasons that will motivate you in a positive way. People can do almost anything if they have a good enough reason for doing it.

When you are doing something because you really want to, you experience an inner freedom that always leads to a deep inner peace, a peace that doesn't depend on what is happening to you. This is the peace that comes from accepting reality instead of fighting it. It can sometimes help if you do what you still find difficult as if you really wanted to do that thing. If you really wanted to do that thing, how would you do it? Do it that way and see what happens. You may discover that you really want to do it.

### **EXERCISE 3. THINGS YOU DON'T LIKE ABOUT OTHERS**

**A. Making a List.** Make a list of things you don't like about other people. Be as specific as possible:

the way A laughs; the way B says the prayers too slowly or too quickly; C's selfishness, moodiness, or thoughtlessness; D's talking behind your back or disclosing something you shared in secret.

#### **B. Take a Good Look at What You Don't Like.**

Sometimes the thing that bothers you about someone doesn't bother others. Perhaps something about that person just rubs you the wrong way. Sometimes what the other person is doing is really wrong. Then you need to see that the behavior and the person are not the same, so that you can "love the sinner and hate the sin." Often, however, something about the other annoys you not because it is bad or wrong but simply because you don't like it, just as you don't like certain kinds of music or food. There is nothing wrong with those things, but they just don't suit your taste. Take a good look at what the other person is doing that you don't like. Is it really so terrible? What keeps you from accepting and loving that person, even though he or she acts that way?

**C. Changing What Can Be Changed.** Is there anything you can do to change the other person? You might ask noisy children to quiet down, or you might ask someone not to do something you don't like. You might not get what you ask for, but usually it doesn't hurt to try. If you know the other person isn't going to change anyway, then the only way to get along with that person is to accept him or her as he or she is. It doesn't mean that you like or accept what the person is doing. You may want to help that person change, and change is easiest when one really feels accepted.

**D. Learning to Understand Others.** It is usually easier to accept impersonal things simply because they are impersonal. When it rains, it rains, and you can't reasonably blame the rain. But personal things are often harder to accept because we unfairly judge others and expect them to be different.

The more we understand people who have unpleasant ways of acting, the easier it will be to accept and forgive and love them. People act the way they do because that is the way they are. And people are the way they are because of what has happened to them. When someone is acting in an abnormal way, we can be certain that something has happened to bring about such behavior. Otherwise that person would be acting in a more normal way. When someone is acting in a strange or unusual way physically, we can easily see or suspect that something has happened to that person. We feel sympathy rather than anger. Is it reasonable to get angry because someone is coughing?

People can be physically weak because they didn't receive enough nourishment as children or because of some later sickness or accident. People can be emotionally weak because as children they



didn't receive enough emotional nourishment or because of difficulties later in life. This means that at some time or other they did not feel loved and accepted. This leaves an emptiness and insecurity that often leads to abnormal behavior.

If this is true, then what these people need most is not blame and criticism but love and acceptance. They can change, but in an atmosphere of blame and condemnation and nonacceptance they are not free to change. They are too busy defending themselves because of the unhappy way they feel about themselves. Being blamed and not feeling accepted only makes them feel and act worse. They will be free to change only when they feel accepted, when they feel that someone really understands and loves them just as they are now.

**E. Our Own Need for Healing.** Any lack of love we may have experienced in life can be healed in prayer as we rest quietly in God's loving presence. God loves us totally and completely without any blame, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8). His unconditional love depends on his loving nature, not on our goodness. He loves us no matter how good or bad we are. We need to hear the Lord speaking of his love for us until we really believe it: "You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you" (Isa. 43:4).

Those unhappy moments when we felt unloved can be healed. In the healing of memories we can go back to those situations, and with the power of God's love, with the Holy Spirit within us, we can find the strength to accept and love and forgive those who have acted in an unloving way. We can't blame or condemn them, because they too have been hurt by their own life experiences and have been taking their anger out on us. We were the innocent victims of their inner struggle. When we understand them a little better, it is easier for us to forgive and love them.

**F. Learning to Practice Acceptance.** Spend time thinking of people whose behavior has been an occasion for your disturbed feelings. Look at them with love and understanding instead of with anger and criticism. Perhaps now you can see that what you don't like isn't so terrible after all. Look at those people with sympathy, knowing that if they are acting in a disturbing way it is because they are disturbed. Express your love and forgiveness and acceptance for one after another. Imagine yourself with those people, one at a time, and rejoice that you can be a little more patient and loving with them. Then try to find a practical way of putting your acceptance into practice.

During the day, when you notice that you are getting annoyed, look at what is happening and see if there is something or someone that needs to be accepted. A very fruitful way of conducting a daily examination of conscience is to review the day in an atmosphere of acceptance. Look with greater acceptance at whatever might have bothered you. You might even learn to thank the Lord for unpleasant situations, seeing them as opportunities for growth. Then you can prepare for the rest of the day or for the next day by looking ahead with acceptance at whatever might happen that would ordinarily bother you.

## CHOICE IS OURS

Our happiness and peace of mind depend not on the things that happen to us but on the way we choose to think about those things. We can choose to have angry and critical thoughts. Or we can choose to accept what is happening, with excusing and forgiving thoughts, and then we will experience the peace that the world cannot give—Christ's very own peace, his gift to us (see John 14:27). But we cannot receive this gift unless our hearts are open. It is acceptance, more than anything else, that keeps our minds and hearts open and receptive to the peace and happiness that the Lord wants to give us.

It was this peace and happiness that St. Paul desired for the Christians of Philippi when he reminded them to fill their minds with the thoughts that would create an atmosphere of peace and happiness. His advice to them is also our hope and our salvation:

I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone. . . . and that peace of God, which is much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise." (4:4–8)



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# Two Houses Fallen

Wilfred L. Pilette, M.D.

*Success has ruined many a man.*

—Benjamin Franklin

**S**uccess comes in many enticing guises, and all of them are dangerous. The recent failings of two church-related counseling programs, Covenant House and the House of Affirmation, are especially instructive in this regard. This article will examine the striking similarities between these programs and will assert that all quests for success are futile and should be abandoned in favor of ongoing attempts at faithfulness.

## FROM MODEST BEGINNINGS

Covenant House opened unpretentiously as a residence for runaway youngsters in New York City in 1968. The program grew to gain national acclaim and support, expanded enormously, and then was wracked by scandal and upheaval, which leaves its future very much in doubt. There have been many exposés of its founder in the national media. *Commonweal* magazine (May 18, 1990) provided the most accurate documentation of Covenant House's longstanding systemic problems.

There were many striking parallels in the rise and fall of Covenant House and of the House of Affirmation, which closed officially in December

1989. The House of Affirmation ("the House") opened modestly in 1971 in Worcester, Massachusetts, as an outclient counseling center for Catholic nuns, priests, and brothers. It enjoyed great success and grew to include five residential centers around the country, outclient services, wide-ranging educational programs, and its own publishing house. The House was already suffering the painful consequences of overexpansion when revelations of financial malfeasance on the part of its cofounder spread rapidly in 1987, starting a death spiral from which it never recovered.

The personal failings of the founders of both programs have been widely publicized and are best left unrepeatable here. Instead, I will simply note the words of John Donne: "Thou knowest this man's fall, thou knowest not his wrestling."

Other similarities between the two organizations came to mind while reading the aforementioned *Commonweal* article ("The Paradoxes of Covenant House"), which was written by former Covenant House staff members Rosanne Haggerty Redmond and Mark Redmond. The authors documented several systemic problems at Covenant House, including the following: "how callously the agency treated its . . . staff"; that "the agency displayed little interest in examining the effectiveness of its services"; and that "those in charge operated as though the virtue of their mission allowed them to establish their own rules of conduct." The authors



observed that "there [was] an aspect of the Covenant House story that [was] quite frightening. The agency and its leaders were dangerously out of touch with their motivations, and the reality that the impulse to do good is always . . . complex. This institutional blindness and lack of self-awareness is at the heart of the whole sad tale."

So once again, readers were confronted with the bitter fact that our moral infirmities are never so pernicious as when we are convinced we are doing good. The Redmonds went on to document Covenant House's disparagement of other programs serving runaway youths, its embellishment of its successes, and its refusal to acknowledge its own limitations.

All the foregoing criticisms were also made about the House of Affirmation, and I found them to be accurate. In my opinion, however, there was something less obvious and more fundamental lacking in both programs: faithfulness to their original missions. Faithfulness had been replaced by the frantic pursuit of success.

## INSIDE THE HOUSE

The House was struggling for its survival when I was appointed its new clinical director in late 1987. The scandalous revelations of financial wrongdoing, along with some pernicious rumors, had spread through much of the national church community, sapping the confidence and support of many sponsors of the program. Two of the five residences had closed already, and several staff members in key leadership positions, feeling bitterly disillusioned and betrayed, had left the organization. But the House's problems ran even deeper: the House had long since begun to lose its way spiritually.

To my surprise, there had been very little discussion of spiritual matters at the staff meetings I had attended prior to 1987 as a consulting psychiatrist at the original residential center in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. In fact, the staff seemed to bend over backwards to avoid influencing residents in their spiritual struggles. At times, the secularization of the program seemed almost grotesque. For example, openly agnostic and atheistic therapists were hired; this was rationalized as a way to ensure the strength and open-mindedness of the staff, which was in fact often grinding its own axes against the "pathogenic" influences of the church and its religious communities. Therapy was too often contaminated by staff members' own conflicts with authority and the church, which were seen as identical.

The fact is, the House had no clear sense of its mission. Furtive attempts at developing a mission statement had been made in its earliest days. If any other attempts had occurred, we found no evidence of them. The lack of a clearly articulated mission

was a major reason for the House's impaired management and faulty decision making.

The House had been chasing success. It had expanded to five residences after overestimating its market and underestimating the quality and strength of other programs that had opened to meet the myriad emerging psychospiritual needs of Catholic clergy and religious. When other programs reached out in the spirit of collaboration they were met with an arrogant unwillingness to cooperate. The quality of their services was disparaged as the House struggled to keep filled its 105 beds by letting its average length of stay drift upward to about one year. The unspoken promise was that if residents could stay long enough, they would be cured. Although many residents made remarkable gains during their stays, too many left without any significant benefit after lengthy and expensive stays.

The following is an example of how self-serving the House's laissez-faire attitude about length of stay could be: A former resident complained to me that he had been allowed to stay almost a year without being challenged to begin to work on his problems in earnest. Instead, he had simply been reassured that he would talk when he was ready. When it was suddenly decided to close his residence because of declining enrollment, he was told he had only a couple of months to deal with his problems before leaving. Transfer to another residence was out of the question because of organizational imperatives.

Success had been measured at the House by the number of beds filled (the facility was usually at or near capacity) and the length of its waiting list (very long). Precise data were kept on these matters, but not on length of stay. Furthermore, no serious attempt to evaluate the quality of care had been made. Most of the meager data collected on treatment outcome was anecdotal in nature.

The trappings of success, however, were many. The facilities were most pleasant and comfortable—in some instances, almost regal. The residents had grown to enjoy a rather grand life-style that was often questioned by sponsors and sometimes resented by them as well. When the financial scandal finally struck, it destroyed much of the already waning trust of the House's benefactors and sponsors and eventually proved fatal. Publius Syrus was indeed correct when he wrote centuries ago that "trust, like the soul, never returns once it is gone."

If grandeur once represented the success of the House, the following describes its failure: All its facilities now lie empty. Most are still waiting to be sold. Its extensive archives have been pared down to a few forlorn materials that now rest in a forgotten file. This, and a score of other file cabinets crammed with clinical records, is all that remains of a program that provided residential treatment to



almost 1,500 religious professionals and evaluation, consultation, education, and outclient services to thousands more.

### A GRACEFUL DEMISE

In the last two years of the program we tried to avoid the trappings of the House's past successes. This was not difficult to do, because we were fighting for the very survival of the organization. We attempted to be faithful to the House's heritage and its original mission. We wrote a new mission statement and strengthened the spiritual component of the program. We also instituted treatment planning, shortened the length of stay to four months, and were intentionally modest in our claims of therapeutic effectiveness. We collected outcome data and sought feedback from the sponsors, 87 percent of whom were satisfied with the program. We didn't disparage other programs and referred clients to them. And after our official closing we continued to deliver on our promise of a one-year aftercare program.

After all our efforts to revive the organization had proved futile, we strove to close the House in a graceful manner. For our closing symbol we chose the first altar cloth used at the Whitinsville Center, and we began our simple final liturgy with this prayer: "Upon this cloth once rested all the best hopes of the House of Affirmation in its early days. . . . Upon it now rests our shattered collective dream. And we remember everyone—residents, outclients, staff members, patrons, benefactors, officers, founders, trustees, and all who supported us—as we give our dream back to God."

### FAITHFULNESS IMPLIES STRUGGLE

Several faithful individuals had been at the center of the positive changes effected during the House's last two years. For me, they vivified Mother Theresa's famous admonition: "God does not ask us to be successful, but to be faithful." I came away from this painfully rich experience with the conviction that all quests for success are futile

and should be replaced by ongoing attempts at faithfulness. This applies most obviously to our spiritual lives, in which success implies the attainment of holiness, while faithfulness admits to the continuing need for renewal. It also applies to our psychological lives, in which success promises the impossible attainment of the perfect self, while faithfulness implies a continuing struggle to become our true selves. And it applies as well to our work lives.

Occupational success is best viewed as a twofold byproduct of useful ideas and hard work. Even business-management books that purport to help us achieve success stress the point that managing success is often more difficult than attaining it. The work itself should provide ample reward. One does well to heed Kipling's wise words about success and failure—to "treat those two imposters just the same."

Moreover, the idealism with which most human enterprises begin gives way, sooner or later, to disillusionment. This holds true in all organizations, even the Soviet Communist party. Interestingly, in his recorded memoirs, Nikita Khrushchev had this to say on the subject: "I must describe the atmosphere of those times—the early days, before a petty bourgeois mentality began to take over the party. Those were romantic times. We gave no thought to *dachas* and fancy clothes. All our time was spent on work."

Disillusionment is always followed by failure unless organizations find ways to renew themselves. The House of Affirmation failed in its efforts at self-renewal. Covenant House continues its valiant struggle to renew itself, and we wish it well.



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# Progression in Apostolic Change

David Coghlan, S.J., and Nicholas S. Rashford, S.J.

**I**n the Winter 1988 issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* we presented apostolic religious life in terms of four levels of participation—individual (I), face-to-face team (II), province (III), and charism and mission (IV).

At level I the task of the individual is to be himself or herself in the process of following God's call. The task of the religious order is to make it possible for the individual to be part of an appropriate psychological and religious contract, as well as to form a context and environment attractive to individuals. When this level is in place and operating effectively, a religious will allow the order and its mission to be a source of personal goal motivation. The individual will still retain his or her own individuality while belonging to the order.

At level II, the team level, the individual enters into working face-to-face relationships in ministry. Effectiveness on this level means that a team is capable of finding and correcting its own dysfunctions. A team is perceived as successful only after it has corrected its dysfunctions. The individual's task is to contribute to the team's functioning. The order's task is to help the team perform significant work in terms of the overall apostolic endeavor.

At level III, the province level, multiple face-to-face ministry teams and communities must function together in order to accomplish their goals. The order's task is to see that these units form an effective aggregate.

At level IV, the charism and mission level, the order's task is to minister to the contemporary world according to the spirit of its constitutions. The order must map its internal resources and the external environment in preparation for its work of evangelization. The ingredients at this level are a deep-rooted, united spirituality of the order's charism, an assessment of the internal resources of the order, and a knowledge of the external world, integrated to form a direction for the order in a given time frame.

The four levels are closely linked. For instance, an action taken on level IV can affect a team's functioning and lead to an individual's questioning his or her vocation, so a triggering event on level IV must be dealt with on levels I and II. Effectiveness on level II depends on level I being in place, level III depends on levels I and II, and level IV depends on all three preceding levels. These connections become more evident in the process of change.

## CHANGE COMES IN STAGES

It is frequently said that change involves a form of dying and resurrection. Structures, behaviors, values, and assumptions must be laid aside and new ones taken on. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's *On Death and Dying* describes how individuals respond to the unexpected knowledge that they are terminally ill. Her popularization of Sigmund Freud's



stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance has provided the basis for much reflection and education on the traumatic processes of coping with dying and death. It is hypothesized that we experience these stages when faced with any personal change, dying and death being the most extreme.

Critical distinguishing factors must be identified, however, in any attempt to link organizational-change models with individual therapeutic models. For instance, in the Kubler-Ross model, death is usually specific and certain for the individual (although in rare cases bargaining may produce psychological and physical changes that put off or even prevent death). The progression through the stages toward change in organizational contexts is not fixed to that degree of certainty. Bargaining may result in an alternative outcome. An undifferentiated transfer of Kubler-Ross's framework to the organizational context does not do justice to the complexity of either. At the same time, a significant indebtedness to her work can be acknowledged.

This article addresses the question of how religious organizations, such as apostolic institutions and religious orders, respond to the demands of change as corporate systems. This process is described in terms of four stages: denial, dodging, doing, and sustaining.

## STAGE I: DENIAL

**Theme: "This doesn't affect us."** The denial stage begins when the need for a change is presented. It can be a denial of the need for change in the face of either others' need to change or a need for change caused by environmental forces. This stage centers on processing information by disputing its value, relevance, or timeliness. This is particularly pertinent when what is under consideration appears to question fundamental beliefs. The person raising the question may be at any level in the order and will meet with denial from above and below. In terms of the taxonomy of change agents, if the change generator is either a "key change agent" or a "demonstrator," he or she will need the support of "patrons" and "defenders" to enforce the drive for change. For movement to occur, there must be an acceptance of the data as valid and pertinent. In the case of the introduction of a province plan, denial can take the form of a dismissive "there is no need for this" or the attitude that "if only we lived religious life the way we used to, we wouldn't have the problems we're having now."

## STAGE II: DODGING

**Theme: "Ignore this. Don't get involved."** The dodging stage begins when the accumulated evidence shows that the change process is likely to take place. The data are perceived as relevant.

Although there is agreement that a small amount of change is needed, there is questioning as to whether the change is critical. A search for countervailing data may take place.

Because the change is coming from outside, dodging is the equivalent of organizational anger. This anger is expressed through passive-aggressive nonparticipation in effecting the change. What effort is spent focuses on stopping the change, or at least finding some way to be peripheral to it. The energy for this comes from many sources, such as frustration, lack of ownership, or fear of change. To return to the example of the introduction of a province plan, the attitude may be expressed thus: "It is only the fad of the current provincial. The next provincial will probably have a different focus, so we don't have to take this too seriously."

At the same time this can be a creative stage. This stage has its active components, though it is characterized by hedging and lack of involvement. An individual can confuse the issue by drawing attention to weaknesses in the approach to the change. For example, he or she may claim that a more serious issue should be dealt with first. This shifts the focus of action. Another method of subverting the issue is to change it in some way. If the discussion is on apostolic priorities, for instance, change it to personnel. If it is on personnel, change it to continuing formation. The mode of communicating agreement is often silence, which can be misinterpreted as opposition. Movement comes when sufficient ownership of the need for the change is accepted.

## STAGE III: DOING

**Theme: "This is very important. We have got to do it now (or, We have got to do it our way)."** When the opposition has been voiced, the frustration released, and agreement reached that the change deserves a try, the doing stage begins. This phase is distinguished by energy applied to implementing the change process. The focus moves from the change generators to the change implementors. The doing stage is not one action; it is a constellation of many actions, perhaps spread over several years, which enable the change to take place and commitment to develop. In an earlier article in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* (Summer 1990) we described this as the management of transition. As the specific change is worked on, more potential changes are uncovered in areas that might include budgeting, restructuring, allocation of personnel, or continuing formation. Such changes may have to be made in order to facilitate the major change.

For superiors the tendency may be to let the momentum take over once the difficult task of gaining consent and involvement has been completed. This can be dangerous for two reasons. First, it is important to ensure that the change



endeavor does not negatively affect relationships among various teams or apostolic units. Polarizations between groups of individuals—young versus old, school ministry versus health care ministry—may emerge from the change process if it is not actively managed by superiors. Second, there is the danger of overloading the change process by trying too many things in addition to the ones that began the process—by attempting to change too much. The tendency is to overload. There needs to be discernment as to what can or cannot realistically be included in the change.

There are two possible outcomes to the issues of this stage. One is “death”—the collapse of the change effort under its own weight. The other is a focusing of energy. An accurate assessment of the force field of the change is necessary to ensure that critical elements in the change are pinpointed and appropriate goals are set. This stage may last for several years before the process moves to the next stage.

#### STAGE IV: SUSTAINING

**Theme: “We have a new way of proceeding.”** This stage is less well-defined than the others, but it is a key stage in any change process. It involves the focusing of energy to follow through on plans and projects. The change adopters come into prominence. The successful completion of this stage comes with the integration of the change into the organization’s structures and its members’ habitual patterns of behavior. Apostolic review is the key process by which change is sustained. In this process, religious teams, apostolates, and provinces reflect on plans and their implementation in a sort of corporate apostolic examen.

#### PHASES OF CHANGE

We have discussed the levels of religious life and described typical behavioral responses to change. These factors interact in a seven-phase sequence. The organization’s movement toward change has a domino effect through the four levels of religious life. There are many ways in which this process may be enacted. The following outline presents one path and at the same time allows for variations.

**Phase I.** In this phase the individual moves through the stages of denial, dodging, and doing.

Change enters the order through an individual. That individual, acting as a generator, goes through his or her own reaction to the need for change by initially denying the validity and pertinence of the change. Once that person recognizes that the change does apply, he or she can dodge the issue and apply responsibility to others (“I don’t have to move now. I can leave it to others. Only

minor adjustments are required.”). This gives way to a realization that the situation is real and threatening and that the order’s ministry will be in peril if something is not done. When the individual articulates the need for change to others, this phase is concluded.

If the individual in question is not in a formal, hierarchical position, he or she may have to approach someone who is in such a role to ensure that the change issue be placed on the agenda. The individual may approach a superior, director of apostolate, or council member and present the issue. The person approached will go through his or her own stages of denial and dodging until he or she accepts the issue as pertinent and relevant and moves to the doing stage. In some instances this process is repeated until it reaches the key individual who has the power to generate movement on the change.

**Phase II.** In this phase the individual is doing; the team moves through the stages of denial, dodging, and doing.

When the key individual has worked through denial and dodging the change, he or she moves to the doing stage and presents the change data to his or her ministry team, emphasizing the necessity for change and beginning to define the dimensions of the change. Key issues are the degree of choice and ultimate control over the change. The individual members of the team go through the denial and dodging stages, and so does the team as a collective unit. The team first denies (“We don’t have to do it”), then dodges (“We don’t have to do it now”), and finally enters into a period of bargaining. The

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tendency to shoot the messenger who has brought the bad news must be recognized at this point.

This phase is concluded when the team recognizes the issue and the need to do something. Ownership of the problem, not just as defined by an individual but as articulated by the team, ends this phase.

**Phase III.** In this phase the individual and the team are doing; the province moves through the stages of denial, dodging, and doing.

This phase involves bringing multiple ministry teams together at the provincial level to confront the issue of the change. The province, through its members, denies the validity and pertinence of the change. Cultural assumptions become central as history and tradition are used to block the change. The process of dodging must be addressed through strategic management. The interfacing of different ministries (education, health care, continuing formation) especially in terms of allocating personnel and resources, can present difficulties. The critical factor in evaluating the need for change and establishing ownership is to see the problem in a new way. The dodging stage at this level confronts the assumption that the province is made up of independent ministries. Each ministry team must be conscious of what the others do and how, and of how what they do interacts with what the others do. Creation and ownership of a sense of province is essential. This phase ends with agreement on the articulation of the problem and the process steps needed to introduce change. Typically, this involves the correct identification of the critical people needed to make the change at the province level and the description of what the future state of the province will be. The phase concludes with ownership of the question of what effect the change will have on the order's relationship with the external environment.

There is a complex reality behind any statement that asserts that a province is at the doing stage of change. While the denying and dodging stages are repeated by every individual, many do not proceed to the doing stage. For the change to occur at the province level, a critical mass of members (adopters) is required. Those who do not accept the change and who are not powerful enough to block it can become peripheral to the system or alienated from it. Some move to the doing stage long after the change has been implemented and established.

**Phase IV.** In this phase the individual, team, and province are doing; the order moves through the stages of denial, dodging, and doing.

Initially in this phase, the question concerns how the order and its stakeholders will perceive themselves and the order if the change is introduced. For example, if the order moves to be more closely

identified with the poor, the potential reaction of the current clientele of the order's schools is discussed. At first the order denies the need for change. When the need is finally acknowledged, the order tries to determine the minimum acceptable amount of change. Successful change requires an understanding of stakeholder demands and behavior and the taking of a proactive stance in their regard.

**Phase V.** In this phase the order, province, and team are doing; the individual is sustaining.

The key individual goes into a sustaining stage once the change effort has been initiated. His or her energy is now released to look for new data and new change directions. Renewed energy comes from the team's commitment to making the process work. This phase concludes when the key individual can look at other data.

**Phase VI.** In this phase the order and province are doing; the individual and team are sustaining.

The team goes into the sustaining stage when the terminal point of change is defined. The key team defines the end, the phases, the deadlines, and the who, what, and when issues of the effort. Then the team's energy is freed as the momentum of the order and province get underway.

**Phase VII.** In this phase all levels of religious life are sustaining.

When there is a new relationship between the order and peer organizations, and when stakeholders come to accept this and interact with the order in a new way, sustaining has occurred. At this point the absorption of energy is lowest. The order is moving on its own impetus. Through its normative behavior it reinforces its culture and thereby sets up the mode for future denial.

## STRESS POINTS OCCUR

A break anywhere in the process can stop the change. Key stress points are points in the process at which a breakdown is most likely to occur. Attention to these stress points can help maintain the impetus for change. If denial succeeds at stage I, then the change does not get in. Stage II, the dodging stage, is critical because it frequently involves laying blame. It affects relationships within the team and puts the change process under pressure. Stage III, the doing stage, is also critical because there is a tendency to attempt too much. The order may lose its balance or choke on too much change. Sustaining at stages III and IV is critical so that the change may survive and produce its desired effect.



In our experience there is a danger of regression, particularly at stages II and III. As the individual experiences the team's denial, and as the team experiences the province's denial, the individual or team may lose confidence and slip back into denial. The presence of a consultant can be significant in confronting this tendency and in helping the superior and the team to process what is going on and to remain firm in their convictions. If the consultant can facilitate the emergence of valid information and help to generate free and informed choice and internal commitment, this danger of backsliding into denial can be averted.

A consultant can also help the superior, the ministry team, the province, and the order attend to the processes within the change effort and identify and work through the phases of the change. A process consultation approach allows the members of the order to understand what is going on, particularly at the stress points, and to develop the key diagnostic and problem-solving skills needed to manage change themselves. A process consultant can collaborate with the members of the order in designing particular activities to help the individual, team, province, and order deal with the issues of each stage.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

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Coghlan, D., and R. Ottaway. "Change Agents in Religious Life." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 11 (Winter 1990): 38-42.

Coghlan, D., and N. Rashford. "Levels of Participation in Apostolic Religious Life." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 9 (Winter 1988): 13-17.

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## Niacin Therapy Warrants Physician's Prescription

**A**s many as 60 million Americans have blood cholesterol levels high enough to warrant their making special efforts to reduce their risk of developing heart disease. To accomplish this, patients often require a combination of both diet and drug therapy. Such drugs as colestipol and cholestyramine have been found to be both safe and effective, but many physicians prescribe the vitamin niacin, which is also known as nicotinic acid.

Because they believe that niacin is "only a vitamin," people wanting to improve their cholesterol level are sometimes inclined to prescribe it for themselves without consulting a doctor. They do not suspect that discomforting and potentially dangerous side effects may result. Somebody tells them that this vitamin decreases the blood level of LDL cholesterol ("bad cholesterol") and at the same time increases the level of HDL cholesterol ("good cholesterol"), so they start taking one gram a day, as physicians often recommend. But even much-lower doses (e.g., 100 milligrams) can cause rashes, flushing of the face and neck, tingling, itching, hives, wheezing, nausea, diarrhea, and abdominal discomfort. When taking larger doses, the *Johns Hopkins Medical Letter* warns, "peo-

ple can experience more-serious side effects, including abnormally high blood sugar levels (especially dangerous to diabetics), elevated uric acid levels (particularly troubling to gout sufferers), abnormal heart rhythms, reactivation of peptic ulcers, and hepatitis (an inflammation of the liver)."

When doctors carefully prescribe niacin, they regularly monitor patients for changes in blood sugar, liver function, and uric acid levels. They are especially watchful when directing patients to take the vitamin in the form of sustained-release capsules, since these have reportedly produced a high incidence of serious side effects. Dr. Jere P. Segrest of the University of Alabama School of Medicine has noted that "sustained-release niacin is about 10 times more likely to cause hepatitis than regular niacin."

Niacin is a good example of a medication that is often therapeutically useful, costs relatively little, and is readily available, but at the same time is risky to take without medical guidance. No wise individual would start treating himself or herself with this vitamin without first consulting a competent and experienced physician.



# *Making Sense of Martyrdom*

*David Gill, S.J.*

**I**gnacio (Nacho) Martin-Baró, one of the six Jesuits slain in El Salvador in November of 1989, was a respected social psychologist. Much of his research focused on what he called "limit situations"—situations in which violence, terror, and the constant threat of death are the rule rather than the exception—and how life in these situations tends to bring out both the worst and the best in people. I think that we now understand rather more about how the worst happens. I would like to try in this article to get a hold on the more elusive side of the equation—namely, how the best comes about. This involves the question of what makes ordinary people into Christian heroes—prophets and martyrs, as Nacho and his companions are now openly described by their fellow Christians in Central America and elsewhere.

It is by all accounts a mysterious process, and one need only glance at the traditional lives of saints to see how hard it is to describe in terms that are credible. As a Christian and a student of literature—and as one who has not lived for any length of time in a violent society like that of El Salvador—my search for answers necessarily takes the form of an examination of the "texts" (i.e., the words, stories, and living exemplars of prophecy and martyrdom) to which our companions appealed in order to explain to themselves and others what they were about. I shall suggest, on the basis of what they said and how they lived and died, that the "limit situation" in which they lived and

worked brought these texts to life for them and gradually, or sometimes suddenly, transformed their lives. To various degrees they appropriated the texts, which changed from abstract ideals into living truths for them. They described the result in Christian terms, as a kind of passage from life through death to a new form of life, experienced even before their actual physical deaths. As Lawrence Cunningham says in his review of Jon Sobrino's book on Romero (*Commonweal*, 10/26/90), "the timeworn words 'prophet' and 'martyr' take on new texture and depth when seen, not as abstract categories of hagiography, but as lenses through which one views [one's] life."

The texts to which I refer are: (1) the Old Testament prophets; (2) the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth as a culmination of the prophets and as proof, by his resurrection, of the validity and ultimate victory of the prophetic vocation; (3) Ignatius of Loyola's interpretation of the life of Jesus; (4) the lives and reality of the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador; (5) the witness of Monseñor Romero; and (6) the experiences of Jennifer Casolo and others as illustrations of the above.

Let me string together some samples of these texts. I think that they build on one another.

## **OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

As read by our Jesuit companions, they are examples of men called by God, often against their



own inclinations and in fear and trembling, to "speak the truth to power." They take God's part against unfaithful and unjust princes, priests, and powers. And by denouncing their idolatries, wars, and oppression of the poor, the prophets face persecution, marginalization, and even death.

The prophets' mission was to recall Israel to her proper place as God's chosen and covenanted people, to confront her with her own best traditions. The demand was not new, but it was repeatedly violated or ignored. The essential theme was there in the Law of Moses (Exod. 22:20–26): "You shall not molest a stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt [and I brought you out]. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan . . . they cry out to me . . . I will surely hear them. If your poor neighbor cries out to me, I will hear him, for I am compassionate."

A major prophetic theme that carried over to the New Testament was that of the *anawim*, the socially oppressed and powerless, whose only recourse was to call on Yahweh. The prophets never sentimentalized the poor as such. Poverty was an evil thing. The mere fact of being poor did not ipso facto make one just. The poor were simply the people most likely to be oppressed.

Another theme, picked up in current papal teaching, was that of the connection between justice and peace. As long as there are large numbers of oppressed people in a society, there can be no peace, only a constant state of warfare of one class against the other, a situation that has been termed institutionalized violence. And this is a standing contradiction to God's will for his chosen people.

In this connection, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of Nacho's last words, thunderously proclaimed to his assassins, as a witness reports: "You are doing an injustice."

## JESUS OF NAZARETH

Jesus was, and saw himself to be, the culmination and fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic tradition. His own self-consciousness and many of his themes were shaped by that tradition.

An important passage in this respect is the episode that Luke (4:14 ff.) places at the start of the public ministry. On a certain Sabbath, Jesus stands up in the synagogue and reads from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to preach the Good News to the poor . . . to announce freedom to the captives and sight to the blind and relief to the oppressed. . . ." Jesus then applies the passage to himself: "Today this scripture is fulfilled among you." The people murmur and are resentful, and Jesus points out that "no prophet is received in his own country." "Filled with wrath," they drive him out and try to kill him.

Another key theme for Jesus was Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh, who offers his "blood for the many" and thus wins redemption for the people.

Our companions were especially attracted by the evangelical picture of Jesus as an opponent of the established powers in Israel and a champion of the poor, oppressed, and women. Also, his reversal of values in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor, for the Kingdom is theirs." And the way in which Jesus' preaching led to trouble with "the power" and, eventually, to death as the crowd chanted, "We have no king but Caesar."

Equally important is Jesus' response—"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"—and the vindication of that response through the resurrection. For as Paul says (Phil. 2:6–8), "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. . . . He humbled Himself, becoming obedient until death, even death on a cross."

## IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Ignatius was a particular person in later Christian history by whom the teaching and spirit of Jesus were mediated to our companions, and by whose interpretation our companions' religious vision was formed and particularized from the time of their early adulthood.

For Ignatius, the key to the Christian life was to have a personal relationship with Jesus the Lord, "to be with Jesus." His prayer: "I ask the Father to put me with his Son." In perhaps his most striking formulation, he told his men that this meant that they were to "earnestly desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with insults, rather than honors. . . . to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. For so Christ our Lord was treated before us" (Spiritual Exercises, 167). "For he gave us an example that in all things possible to us we might seek through the aid of his grace to imitate and follow him, since he is the way that leads to life" (General Examen, 101).

## THE POOR OF EL SALVADOR

El Salvador's poor, I suggest, constitute a "text" from which to read God's working in the world and in relation to which to gauge a response. In a country like theirs—or any country, for that matter—the first criterion of authentic Christian action must be the answer to the question, How does this action fit with the facts of injustice, poverty, and oppression in the place where we live and work? We know what our companions saw, and what their action was, and what it cost.

The fancy name for this, I guess, is option for the poor, and it might be called the perspective of liberation theology, a somewhat more "horizontal" calling than that of the older prophets, with their blazing visions and their direct consciousness of God's voice. The more "vertical" calling is medi-



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## **The Jesuits saw in Romero's background, conversion, and courageous stand against injustice a paradigm for themselves**

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ated through people and their lives. The theological emphases behind it are simple enough, and not really new: (1) the church is the whole people of God, not any one class, but with preference for the most needy; (2) integral human liberation from every form of unjust suffering is an indispensable first step in the coming to birth of the Kingdom of God in the world; (3) ultimately, the people must and can free themselves, given a fair chance; and (4) hence, there is the absolute necessity to be taught and led by the people—to accompany them and be in solidarity with them, even into danger, if that is where they are—to be their voice if need be.

A couple of examples may help to make this clear. This summer I spoke with a Jesuit about the risks of working in El Salvador and how he copes there. He told of going last spring to say mass in a conflicted zone outside San Salvador. When he arrived he noticed that there were soldiers standing around outside the church and looking menacing. His first thought was to rethink the fiery sermon he had prepared. He was prevented by the people who were preparing the music for the mass. Their reaction to the presence of the soldiers was to replace the songs they had ready with others that had more radical lyrics. "What was I supposed to do," he asked, "give a wishy-washy sermon?" The people led him into danger, but in such a way that he could not refuse to follow.

Nacho wrote in a 1985 article about working in the midst of the deaths of friends and frequent bombings of his office at the university: "These experiences are what permit one to enter into the world of the oppressed, to feel, from a little closer, the experience of those who carry years of oppression on their shoulders, and who today are emerg-

ing into a new history. These are truths that can only be learned through suffering or from the critical vantage point of extreme situations."

### **THE WITNESS OF MONSEÑOR ROMERO**

Though they had their reservations about him in the beginning—Romero was the preferred candidate of the Salvadoran Right—the Jesuits came to admire him greatly. Why? Not, as some cynics have claimed, because he was an important convert to their political program, but because they saw in his background, conversion, and courageous stand against injustice for the sake of God a paradigm for themselves. Once again, the words of Nacho: "If calling reality by its true name transformed Monseñor Romero into a prophet for his people, into the voice of those without voice, it also transformed him into a revolutionary and a subversive for the established powers."

Romero also provided believing Salvadorans with words to say what they felt. Perhaps his most powerful statement of his beliefs and hopes is the one in the interview he gave just two weeks before his death. It is extraordinary, I think, how this simple statement recapitulates all the themes we have been discussing: the prophetic call from God, martyrdom as a gift, and his own sense of unworthiness, identification with the people, confidence in resurrection for them and for himself, and forgiveness of his killers:

I have frequently been threatened with death. I must say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death but in the resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador. I am not boasting; I say it with the greatest humility. As a pastor, I am bound by divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that includes all Salvadorans, even those who are going to kill me. . . . I shall be offering my blood for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. Martyrdom is a grace from God that I do not believe that I have earned. . . . May my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people. . . . You can tell them, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon them. . . . But I wish that they could realize that they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the church of God—the people—will never die.

Romero—an ordinary man with his own cultural and religious limitations—had been moved and converted through engagement with the Salvadoran reality—and through the grace of God, which had come for him to amount to the same thing—to the point that he had fully appropriated the tradition of the prophets and Jesus and the insights of liberation theology. And so, in a way, he had already offered his life. He was living at a new level, called "resurrected" by Christians, where these words were simply obvious to him—where the virtues of courage and humility, unrestricted love, even of enemies, and sincere forgiveness,



hope, and faith simply flowed for him unassumingly, authentically, even serenely.

It is significant that after they killed the Jesuits, the soldiers also shot up a photograph of Romero that was in one of their rooms. "They know he still lives and they still want to kill him," said one of their companions.

## JENNIFER CASOLO

Jennifer told me the story of her interrogation in a Salvadoran prison, when she was charged with hiding weapons in her backyard during the FMLN (Farabundi Marti Front for National Liberation) offensive of November 1989. In all, she spent eighteen days in jail. One day a young lieutenant tried to get her to sign a confession admitting that her two Salvadoran housemates were guilty. If she signed, he said, she could be released to go home. She refused because it was not true. He was baffled and kept asking—shouting—"Why do you want to suffer? You don't have to. Just sign." This went on for an hour, until suddenly she burst into tears and felt a great sense of freedom that expressed itself in words like: "Why not suffer? Jesus did. The people do. Why not me? It does not matter if I die. If I die others will rise up. The people will never die." Needless to say, the interrogator didn't get it. But he did stop trying to convince her to sign the false confession.

I pointed out to Jennifer that she had used words very like those of Monseñor Romero in his last interview. I asked her why. She said she didn't know for sure. She had read and been inspired by Romero's words, but somehow in that moment they had become real for her in a way they had never been before. They went "from her head to her heart," as she put it. Nacho might have said, in his dry social-science language, that she now saw them from the critical vantage point of an extreme situation.

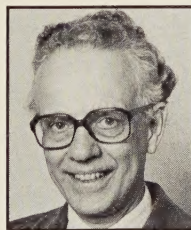
## NEW LEVEL OF LIFE

I would suggest that something like that had happened in the lives of our Jesuit companions, or

was on the way to happening, or was what they wanted to happen. Perhaps it had come in different ways to each of them—perhaps only in the actual moment of death, as they lay face-down on the ground and heard the shots. If I am right, then dying on the sixteenth of November 1989 made perfect sense to them, for they had already died to themselves and were living on a new level. This would also explain the remark of a Jesuit at the scene of the crime, in the presence of their bodies. A reporter asked, in the manner typical of reporters in such situations, "What are you feeling at this moment?" The Jesuit answered, "Envy."

If I am right, then concepts such as bravado, or politics, or Marxism, or career, or prestige, or living on the edge of history are wholly inadequate to explain their lives and deaths. Rather, their lives and work were shaped by an experienced religious vision, a gift, a conversion, a passage from life through death to new life here and now. And so they become a new "text" for us, or as Lawrence Cunningham says, "lenses" through which to view our own lives.

Martyrdom has always been considered the test case par excellence of the Christian life. The words of Ignacio Ellacuria, which are engraved on the bronze plaque at the entrance to the Boston College dormitory dedicated to him and his companions, speak from this tradition and help to explain it: "The Spirit breathes in many ways and supreme among them is the disposition to give one's life for others, whether by daily commitment or by the sacrifice of a violent death."



Father David Gill, S.J., is associate professor of classics and chairman of the department at Boston College. He is a regular visitor to Latin America and an old friend of Ignacio Martin-Baró, one of the Jesuits slain in El Salvador in 1989.



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# BOOK REVIEW

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*Self-Ministry Through Self-Understanding: A Guide to Christian Introspection*, by Robert J. Wicks. Chicago, Illinois: Loyola University Press, 1990. 112 pp. \$8.95 (paperback).

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**T**his is a welcome reprint of an extremely useful book first published by Crossroads in 1983. The author, professor and director of program development for the graduate programs in pastoral counseling at Loyola College in Maryland, is a distinguished leader in the field of educating and training people for the helping professions. The book addresses from a Christian perspective two of the major concerns of people working in these fields. The first is how to maximize the development of one's potentials. The second is how to keep operating at high efficiency, how to avoid burnout.

We might paraphrase the book's thesis as follows: You cannot grow to optimal strength nor stay there without taking proper care of yourself and your assets; you will be happiest and most effective if you develop the gifts God has given you. Moreover, you cannot take care of yourself without knowing yourself; you cannot develop God's gifts if you do not look carefully to see what they are.

The book is built around the self-administered seventy-five-sentence completion instrument "Chris-

tian Introspection Self-Assessment Form," which the author has developed as an aid in self-knowledge and a guide to growth. The instrument, the preparatory directions given for it, and the suggestions for interpreting it are at once solid, balanced, and creative.

An early chapter titled "Healing Areas" gives brief but useful suggestions on imbalance, lack of clarity, and negative emotions (including unexpressed anger, a problem for most of us some of the time and a major problem for some of us much of the time). A later chapter, "Burnout and Commitment," includes a series of perceptive questions on the important areas of expectations, self-knowledge, and support. This chapter alone, short as it is, will be worth the price of the book for many readers.

Is the book or the self-understanding it advocates a substitute for professional therapy, counseling, or supervision? Obviously not, nor is this the intention. But used with honesty, the book might enable some hitherto troubled but resistant persons to utilize these avenues of help. It can be of enormous help to those involved in these processes. Across the board, it will be useful for persons engaged in spiritual direction, formation, retreats, guidance, and religious education on either the giving or receiving end. It is an excellent book, and Loyola University Press is to be congratulated for making it available again at a modest price.

—Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O.



## **A Timely Suggestion**

It is not too early to think about Christmas 1991 and the gifts you might want to send to your loved ones or friends. If your gift list this year includes someone involved in religious leadership or formation work, pastoral care or spiritual direction, or any other kind of ministry to youth or adults, may we suggest a one-year gift subscription to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT?

As you know, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT consistently features current knowledge from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, organizational development, and spirituality. Any religious, layperson, priest, deacon, or bishop seriously concerned about achieving full personal growth for self and others would be delighted to receive such a thoughtful and useful gift. The four issues that will be delivered in 1992 will serve as repeated reminders of your continuing interest in enriching the recipient's ministry as well as his or her life.

To order a gift subscription, just send the name(s) and address(es) of the person(s) to whom you want us to mail HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with your own name and a check for the subscription price. Before Christmas we will send the recipient(s) an attractive card that announces your gift and conveys your Christmas and New Year's greetings.

You can use the tear-out card included in this issue. We will be delighted to help make your gift-giving just a little easier this Christmas and appreciated all year long.



# Book-of-the-Year Announcement

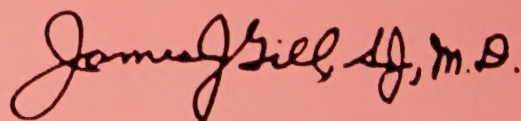
**A** Christian moral vision applicable to our times seems light-years distant from the realities we face daily. What we constantly encounter, either personally or through the mass media, is a deluge of violence in the streets, drug traffic, alcohol addiction, sexual immorality, dishonest business dealings, political corruption, abuse of children, fraudulent treatment of the aged, thefts, environmental wastefulness, racial discrimination. These and a thousand other evils torment our souls and cry out incessantly for prevention. But no realistic person believes that either government or law-enforcement agencies can eliminate them. Neither can we expect the warnings and threats issuing from Sunday pulpits to produce any widespread conversion to national righteousness. The best that we can reasonably hope to do, if we seriously want to transform this country into a place where virtue flourishes and wickedness declines, is to find a way to provide our children and adolescents with an effective moral education. Goodness is learned especially in the home, school, and church, but only when those who provide instruction know how to prepare the minds and hearts of the young to accept and put into practice the basic principles of morality.

During recent decades Catholic educators, among others, have turned to the writings of Lawrence Kohlberg and his disciples in the hope of learning a practical psychological theory that would undergird their efforts at instructing in morality. Gradually, however, Kohlberg's justice-based theory, which emphasizes a rational approach to making moral decisions in terms of rights and duties, has come to be criticized for failing to recognize the countless situations in which moral decisions must be confronted affectively and not just rationally. Moreover, Kohlberg's theory of moral development has proven to be unsatisfactory because of its inability to convert moral cognition into moral behavior. Only recently has an alternative theory of morality been presented that stresses the role of emotion and also focuses on moral sensitivity, character, virtue, and moral vision.

This new theory of moral development, which contains profound and useful insights easily channeled into moral education, has been clearly and excitingly presented by psychologist Charles M. Shelton in *Morality of the Heart: A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life*. In this benchmark work, Shelton builds upon the theories of Martin Hoffman, Carol Gilligan, and Norma Haan to estab-

lish human empathy as the foundation for a morality based on caring, or Christian love. Shelton views the capacity for empathy, "an affective response more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own," as the foundation required if one is to accept the gospel's command to live a life of loving care for one another. He shows that "empathic experience and emotion provide a fundamental understanding of morality that the impartiality of the justice principle is unable to address." Shelton demonstrates that "heart," his metaphor for understanding an empathically based morality, acts as a nutrient for furthering one's moral vision, since it "serves as a form of affective knowledge that points out our fundamental concerns and desires." Underlying this morality, empathy "fosters not only an openness and vulnerability to the hurts of others, but encourages actual behaviors that promote Christian praxis." Christian empathy, which we can all help the young to learn, Shelton says, "leads to experiencing to some degree on an affective level another's situation; meaning is given to this experiencing through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, thus motivating one to offer willingly his or her gifts, nurtured in a believing community of faith, for the building of God's Reign."

Because we regard *Morality of the Heart* to be a monumental contribution to the field of education for human development, we are delighted to present to its author, Father Charles M. Shelton, S.J., Ph.D., professor of psychology at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Book-of-the-Year Award. We also thank and congratulate the Crossroad Publishing Company of New York City for having given us this most valuable resource book, along with Shelton's earlier writings, *Adolescent Spirituality* and *Morality and the Adolescent*. These three contributions offer us great hope for the future of America, since they show us what we can do for the youths in our care, who are being formed by us for the enrichment of our Catholic community and for the moral improvement of our own country and even of the wider world—which for better or worse our nation constantly influences.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief